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THE FRENCH RECEPTION OF BRITISH CINEMA

By

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Abstract:

The French Reception of British Cinema

French writings on British cinema have tended, and continue, to be dominated by one single figure. Director François Truffaut's famous dismissal of British cinema has become a standard reference. The systematic repetition of his critique has worked to produce an official story that has become emblematic of the French perspective on British cinema. Yet to date the subject has received little scholarly attention beyond Truffaut.

This study documents in depth the French reception of British cinema in the post-war period and relies extensively on the use of archives and research into primary sources including unpublished historical documents and the use of oral sources. These are supplemented by secondary materials such as survey histories of cinema, national film histories, anthologies of film criticism and biographies of film critics and film journals.

The thesis is divided into four chapters that relate to four distinct historical periods from the immediate post-war years up to the late 1990s. In each of the chapters I re-locate critical texts and ideas within the historical conjuncture from which they have emerged. In the process, the thesis uncovers positive readings of British cinema and thus redresses the historiography that has characterised the representation of the French perspective as uniformly negative.

The central argument of this thesis centres on an examination of critical writings as inverted discourses on French cinema. Considering contemporary reviews as a prism through which the identity of French cinema may be articulated or refracted, I show that the discourses of auteurism and realism have played a key role in the debates around cinema and thus in the critical construction of British cinema. I conclude that the French reception of British cinema must be understood as an articulation of anxieties, concerns and struggles around the identity of French cinema itself.

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Introduction:

The French Reception of British Cinema

French writings on British cinema have tended, and continue, to be dominated by one single figure. In a classic statement, director François Truffaut famously dismissed British cinema as "anticinematic" and the British influence on world cinema as especially insignificant. He conceded that the films of Alfred Hitchcock and Charlie Chaplin had "survived the test of time", but, he asked, rhetorically, "isn't there a contradiction between the terms "cinema" and "Britain"?"¹ The analysis on which this highly respected French director based his judgement is, unarguably rather Anglophobic, simplistic and limiting, but this should not surprise us, for the discourse behind his rejection was typical of the critical tenets cultivated by the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics of the 1950s (Truffaut was instrumental to the consolidation of this discourse and had led the way with his famous attack, on "a certain tendency of the French cinema" in 1954).²

Truffaut's comment has endured. The polemical roots of his critique have largely disappeared from view but the suggestion that there was a constitutive antinomy between "cinema" and "Britain" has had a tremendous and lasting importance for British cinema scholars and virtually no one who writes about

¹ François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), 100.

² François Truffaut, "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 31, January 1954, 15-28, translated as "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema", in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods, Vol. 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 224-237.

British cinema has been able to do so without quoting Truffaut.³

The official story that has been encoded in this critique has become a standard reference for both scholars and journalists whose focus has typically fallen on a small corpus of writings that in some way allegorise the French view on British cinema. The systematic repetition of this perspective has worked, since the 1960s, to produce an official story, a discernable doxa that has set the limits for what is thinkable about French writings on British cinema and resolutely left any alternative accounts of British cinema in France out of the picture.

The continuous high cultural currency of the official story represented by Truffaut also pinpoints a major schism underlying most writings on the subject: on the one hand there has been a monumental literature on one journal, *Cahiers du cinéma* and on the other a surprising dearth of material on the rest of a numerically considerable output, an anomaly that has largely persisted. To date no extensive research on the reception of British cinema in France appears to have been done. Moreover, the processes that led Truffaut to forge this negative opinion have been invariably ignored and have left it open to a high degree of instrumentalization.

There seem to be many reasons for the persistence of these unquestioned assumptions. Firstly, quite apart from his emblematic status as a director in French film history, François Truffaut is one of the best-known French film critics of the post-war period. Secondly, the emergence of a dominant critical discourse through *Cahiers du cinéma* and André Bazin more or less coincided in the 1960s with the establishment of film studies as an academic discipline

³ Charles Barr, "Introduction: Amnesia and Schizophrenia", in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), 1.

devoted to the study of *auteurs* and films as texts. Thirdly, at least in English, there has been a limited availability of primary critical texts in translation and a scarcity of studies that document cross-cultural exchanges within a Franco-British or even a European cinema context.

This thesis investigates the critical reception of British cinema in France in the post-war period. The work that follows sets out to determine what kind of readings have been produced in France and what they reveal about the cinematic and cultural context from which they have emerged. My aim is to go beyond published canonical texts and embrace a more expansive view of film culture in order to document the historical determinations that have structured and conditioned the way in which British cinema has been consumed and understood. By investigating the discourses behind the reception of British cinema, I hope to make explicit the need for an analysis of texts and ideas that is concretely localised and takes into account the historical conjuncture within which they appeared. Before providing the necessary overview of historical writings on cinema and those that specifically address British cinema, I will give an account of the structure and methodology of my research.

Film and History

In his model of film and history, Dudley Andrew argues that, "every history that treats the cinema must calculate the importance of films within a world larger than film. Culture can be said to surround each film like an atmosphere

comprised of numerous layers and spheres, as numerous as we want".⁴ Following Andrew's conception of the object of film historical analysis as an investigation of the intertexts that surround or have surrounded a film text or a series of film texts, this thesis will take as its methodological basis the branch of film history known as reception studies. As a general working principle, then, my approach throughout this study could be described as an archaeological research project aiming to document the intertexts, the network of discourses, and historical factors that have surrounded the critical reception of British cinema in post-war France. I will now schematically survey accounts of reception studies with a view to establishing their usefulness in making possible a complex representation of the subject.

Before the historical turn in film studies in the 1980s, the history of cinema had been traditionally confined to film texts and their production. Following the New Historicism in literary studies, film scholars have engaged in debates about the problems and inadequacy of conventional histories of cinema, organised along national lines and where aesthetic values, rather than historical interest were foregrounded, and they have attempted to bridge the critical separation of text from context. One direction of the historiographic paradigm in film studies has been to look at the discourses that surround films at different moments and how reading formations have constituted historically situated viewers. The adoption of Tony Bennett's notion of a reading formation in recent film studies has provided a way of attending to the actual history of a text's social circulation rather than privileging the originating conditions of a

⁴ Dudley Andrew, "Film and History", in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 185.

given text's production.⁵ In Bennett's conceptualisation, the activation and reading of texts exist within a process whereby they:

Exist only as variable pieces of play within the processes through which the struggle for their meaning is socially enacted: kept alive within the series of bids and counter-bids which different critical tendencies advance in their attempt to organise reading practices - to make texts mean differently by re-writing their relation to history - texts are thus kept alive only at the price of being always other than just themselves.⁶

Historical studies of reception, according to the denomination used by Janet Staiger, involve a methodology informed by archival research and which roots its analysis in material and historical investigation, supporting its claims with tangible documents. A critical history of the reception of British cinema in France is thus an attempt at "a historical *explanation* of the event of interpreting a text"⁷, assuming that the immanent meaning of a film is questionable. Thus for instance, Steven Cohan in a recent case study of the reception of *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen, Gene Kelly, 1952), has demonstrated how although a film text has its own specificity, different interpretative frameworks will cause its significance to shift⁸, while the cultural historian Roger Chartier, in his historiography of reading, has argued that while a text retains a certain textual characteristic, it also changes as the social circumstances and modes of reading that surround it undergo change:

To be sure the creators [...] always aspire to pin down their meaning and

⁵ See Noel King, "Hermeneutics and Reception Aesthetics", in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 212-32.

⁶ Tony Bennett, "Texts in history: the determinations of reading and their texts", in David Attridge, Geoff Bennington and Robert Young, *Post-structuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 76.

⁷ Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 81, emphasis in text.

⁸ Steven Cohan, "Case study: interpreting *Singin' in the Rain*", in Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (eds.), *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Arnold, 2000), 53-75.

proclaim the correct interpretation, the interpretation that sets out to constrain reading (or viewing). But without fail, reception invents, shifts about, distorts.⁹

Contemporary historians have begun to redeem reviews as important sources of information about reception. Their use value in reception studies lies in their mobilisation of denominations that help to establish the terms of discussion and debate within the culture at large. The question is whether one can straightforwardly read the events of reception or the discourses that produce these events directly from these texts. As Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery have argued, for example, that these materials might be better seen as having an agenda-setting function. Rather than straightforwardly producing events, there are parts of a process through which intertexts are constructed and readings are framed. As they put it, these texts may not tell "audiences what to think so much as [...] what to think *about*".¹⁰ Similarly, published materials may be seen as traces of the terms within which texts were publicly evaluated and as one of the ways in which critics position themselves within hierarchies of taste:

Reviews also represent materials that signify the cultural hierarchies of aesthetic value reigning at particular times. As a primary public tastemaker, the critic operates to make, in Pierre Bourdieu's parlance 'distinctions'. Among other things, the critic distinguishes legitimate from illegitimate art and proper and improper modes of aesthetic appropriation. As the epigraph suggests, it also often secures a class position far from the vulgar crowd in the process.¹¹

⁹ Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), x.

¹⁰ Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985) 90, emphasis in text.

¹¹ Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture and The Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 70.

In reception studies, then, questions of values and taste and the relation between the aesthetic and the social which are the heart of the interpretative enterprise become contextualised. It is also interesting to note, in relation to my own project, that Barbara Klinger has identified cross-cultural reception as "another dimension of a film's "meaningful" existence". Such perspectives, she contends, "emphasise how malleable film meaning is by demonstrating the difference national contexts make to how texts are appropriated".¹² However, if scholarly interest in cross-cultural exchanges and the production, dissemination and consumption of film across national boundaries has become ubiquitous, work in this area has tended, for the most part to focus on the Hollywood Europe axis¹³, whilst in studies that concentrate on European cinema history, work on audiences and reception has remained underdeveloped and mostly localised.¹⁴ Noting in a recent article "how little impact the supranational implications of the term "European" has had on theoretical frameworks and methodologies in this area", Tim Bergfelder has called for "a transnational history of European cinema which might focus on the strategies and practices by which filmic texts "travel" and become transformed according to the specific requirements of different cultural contexts and audiences".¹⁵

In historical reception studies, in order to discover audience response, particular emphasis is placed on archival research and on primary sources of

¹² Barbara Klinger, "Film history terminable and interminable: recovering the past in reception studies", *Screen*, 38: 2, summer 1997, 122-3.

¹³ See for instance Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Hollywood and Europe, Economics, Culture, National Identity 1945-95* (London: bfi, 1998), Sarah Street, *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the United States* (London: Continuum, 2002).

¹⁴ Ginette Vincendeau, "Issues in European cinema", in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 442.

¹⁵ Tim Bergfelder, "National, transnational or supranational cinema? Rethinking European Film Studies", *Media, Culture & Society*, 27, 3, 2005, 15.

evidence. The main question structuring my project will be the constitution of the critical discourses that have informed French film culture. In order to investigate the criteria for evaluating British films from a French perspective and to answer the question of how British cinema has been critically received in France during the period under consideration, the materials with which I will be dealing will consist mainly of reviews in both the specialist cinephile press and in a range of other film writings. This project will thus rely extensively on two particular kinds of materials. The use of archives, drawing on contemporary documents, research into primary sources including unpublished historical documents and the use of oral sources. The contemporary material consulted includes reviews and articles, from popular to highbrow, most of it appearing in fan magazines or specialised film journals and press cuttings from the daily and weekly national press (particularly the collections at *BIFI*, *Bibliothèque du Film*, the *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal* and the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, Paris, and the British Film Institute Library in London). These will be supplemented by secondary materials such as survey histories of cinema, national film histories, anthologies of French film criticism, biographies of film critics and film journals (all this material will be presented in translation with the original version in the appendices that complement each case-study). The main area that engages with a critical evaluation of British cinema is the field of film criticism. Since a major part of my research is devoted to critical writings, I will now chart the way in which French film criticism has been traditionally approached. Later I will give an account of how French survey histories of cinema and French British cinema histories have viewed British cinema.

Historiography of French Film Criticism

Scholarly work on the historiography of French film criticism in the post-war era has tended to focus on film journals, individual critics and film movements. In English language, *Cahiers du cinéma* has been the focus of a four-volume anthology, starting with the pioneering work of Jim Hillier. Each volume includes invaluable overviews in the introduction and provides a complementary anthology of selected texts in translation, most of them never published in English.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the fact that it is overwhelmingly critical writings from *Cahiers du cinéma* that have been translated into English is noteworthy.

In French, Antoine de Baecque's two volume biography of the journal has become the primary reference on French film criticism of the post-war era whilst the writings of François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, Jean-Luc Godard and André Bazin, the latter cofounder of *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1951, have all been collected in anthologies.¹⁷ Several of these critics have also been the object of biographical works.¹⁸

It is also useful to turn to studies that single out certain moments or

¹⁶ Jim Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du cinéma. The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), *Cahiers du cinéma, Volume 2. The 1960s: New Wave, New Cinema, Re-Evaluating Hollywood* (New York, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Bfi, 1986), Nick Browne (ed.), *Cahiers du cinéma, Volume Three. 1969-1972: The Politics of Representation* (New York, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Bfi, 199), David Wilson and Berenice Reynaud (eds.), *Cahiers du cinéma, Volume 4. 1973-1978: History, Ideology and Cultural Struggle* (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁷ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?, Vol. 1*, translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1967), *André Bazin, What is Cinema?, Vol. 2*, translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1971), Bert Cardullo (ed.), *Bazin at work: Major essays & Reviews from the Forties and Fifties* (London: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁸ Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana, *François Truffaut* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), *François Truffaut* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), translated by Catherine Termerson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), Colin McCabe, *A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003).

movements as they have a bearing on how British cinema is viewed, especially the French New Wave given Truffaut's hostility. One exception to the exclusive focus on *Cahiers du cinéma* is Peter Graham's *The French New Wave*, an anthology published in 1968 that includes articles from *Positif*, but has long been out of print. One might also turn to the essays by Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier, who consider the early theoretical work by pre-war cinephiles (Delluc, Epstein) and post-war theoreticians (Bazin and *Cahiers du cinéma*) in order to analyse their legacy in socio-cultural terms.¹⁹

The history of *Positif* has been traced in a short essay²⁰, an autobiographical account of the early days of the journal by its editor, Bernard Chardère²¹, an edited correspondance between the authors²² and in anthologies of collected writings²³, but only one in English.²⁴ Film criticism has also recently become an historical object of study as in Michel Ciment and Jacques Zimmer's *La critique de cinéma en France* and René Prédal's recent synthesis of French criticism in the post-war period.²⁵ Cinephilia is also emerging as a topic in its own right, for reasons that I will examine in the course of this project. Antoine de Baecque's recent compendium, *La cinéphilie. Invention d'un regard*,

¹⁹ Noël Burch, "Cinéphilie et masculinité" (I), *Iris*, 26, autumn 1998, 191-6, Geneviève Sellier, "cinéphilie et masculinité" (II), *Iris*, autumn 1998, 197-206.

²⁰ Thierry Frémaux, "L'aventure cinéphilique de *Positif*", *Vingtième siècle, revue d'histoire*, 23, July-August 1989, 21-33.

²¹ Bernard Chardère, *Figurez-vous qu'un soir en plein Sahara...* (Paris: Institut Lumière, Actes Sud, 1992).

²² *Positive liaisons: correspondance des auteurs 1952-1958* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 2000).

²³ *Positif: 1-15* (Paris: Editions Jena-Michel Place, 1997), *Positif: 16-31* (Paris: Editions Jean Michel Place, 2000), *L'amour du cinéma: 50 ans de la revue Positif* (Paris: Folio, 2002).

²⁴ Michel Ciment and Lawrence Kardish (eds.), "*Positif*" 50 Years, *Selections from the French Film Journal* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002).

²⁵ Michel Ciment and Jacques Zimmer (eds.), *La critique de cinéma en France* (Paris: Ramsay Cinéma, 1997), René Prédal, *La critique de cinéma en France* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004).

*histoire d'une culture (1944-1968)*²⁶ offers a synthesis of the main events that have marked cinephilia during what he sees as its "golden age" up until its "tragic" death after May 1968. Describing cinephilia as a specifically Parisian development, "a way of watching film, speaking about them and then diffusing that discourse", the work of de Baecque is heavily weighted around *Cahiers du cinéma*. Although he includes a welcome chapter on *Positif* critic Roger Taillieur, this somewhat reinforces the idea of that only the critics of *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s are the true representatives of French film culture in the post-war period; the writings of lesser known critics of the 1940s, Jean-Pierre Chartier for instance, are omitted and the existence of other important film journals such as *Midi-Minuit fantastique* or *Jeune cinéma* only mentioned in passing.

Retrospective accounts of French critical writings have thus tended to focus mainly on the cinephile environment, although there are also biographical studies that concentrate on more mainstream film journals such as *Le Cinéma monde*²⁷ and *L'Ecran français*²⁸ or more specialised ones such as *Midi-Minuit fantastique*.²⁹ These various interventions are discussed during the course of my work and references can be found in the bibliography

In most cases however, only a relatively narrow canon of work is known outside France. While this approach has tended to reduce a vast and diverse production to what is only one aspect of French writings on the cinema, the

²⁶ Antoine de Baecque, *La cinéphilie. Invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture 1944-1968* (Paris: Fayard, 2003).

²⁷ Chantal Susanne, *Le Cinéma monde* (Paris: Grasset, 1977).

²⁸ Olivier Barrot, *L'Ecran Français, 1943-1953, histoire d'un journal et d'une époque* (Paris: Les Editeurs français réunis, 1979).

²⁹ René Prédal, "*Midi-Minuit fantastique*", *étude analytique et sémiologique* (Nice: Centre du Vingtième Siècle, 1977).

limited availability of translated texts has also hindered the comprehensive study of French film criticism. Having examined the historiography of French film criticism in general, I will now focus on specific views of British cinema in French survey histories of cinema. This critical work on British cinema will be handled chronologically, as I map out what little or sustained work has been done in this area of study and examine how it has developed or changed in focus over the past century.

Historiography of World Cinema

Most historical overviews that emerged after WWI in book-length histories of world cinema were essentially variants of what David Bordwell has called the Standard Version of aesthetic history which developed alongside the canon-building Basic Story whose point of departure was a commonplace "neo-Hegelian belief that in art a nation's spirit (*Volksgeist*) expresses itself".³⁰ Both the Standard Version and the Basic Story accounted for the stylistic evolution of cinema and included nation-by-nation surveys, concentrating on individual creators and ignoring international developments in the film industry. In French aesthetic surveys of world cinema, where the dominant concept was that of cinema as an art, the question of British cinema generally figured as negligible, worthy of a line or two, at most a paragraph. Historian Léon Moussinac's opinion on the subject is typical: "England has never produced an

³⁰ David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1997), 20.

English film".³¹ This view of British cinema was carried on by extreme right-wing (even *fascisants*) Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach's 1935 *Histoire du cinéma*, where British cinema was discussed in just a couple of pages and dismissed as "hard to distinguish from American cinema" except from those few films where England "has attempted to exalt its national greatness".³²

This influential version of history also formed the basis for the overviews of the development of film art written after WWII such as Communist historian Georges Sadoul's multi-volume *Histoire générale du cinéma* (six volumes, 1947-1975) and other works of this particular genre such as René Jeanne and Charles Ford's *Histoire Encyclopédique du cinéma* and Pierre Leprohon's and Jean Mitry's more recent overview *Histoire du cinéma*.³³ In Georges Sadoul's formative view of film history, British filmmakers had had pioneering beginnings, then fell into decline or stagnation. Internationalism was sometimes equated with uniformity and a lack of originality, while nationalism was considered to foster more artistic filmmaking. Thus although Sadoul had distinguished early British filmmakers as important contributors to the development of film³⁴, the achievements of British cinema in the post-war

³¹ Léon Moussinac, *Panoramique du cinéma* (Paris: Sans Pareil, 1929), 37, *L'Age ingrat du cinéma* (Paris: Editions du Sagittaire, 1946), 136.

³² Bardèche and Brasillach, *Histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Denoël & Steele, 1935), 334-5.

³³ Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma, Tome I: Les pionniers du cinéma* (Paris: Denoël, 1947), *Tome II: Les pionniers du cinéma, 1897-1908* (Paris: Denoël, 1948), *Tome III: Le cinéma devient un art* (Paris: Denoël, 1951), René Jeanne and Charles Ford, *Histoire encyclopédique du cinéma*, (Paris, Robert Laffont/SEDE, 1947-62), Pierre Leprohon, *Histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1963), Jean Mitry, *Histoire du cinéma: art et industrie* (Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1967-80).

³⁴ Georges Sadoul was one of the first historians to celebrate and define the achievements of the "Brighton School" of early filmmakers in the period circa 1897-1903. This helped produce a generation of early film historians in France (such as Noël Burch) who generally pay much close attention to the work of G. A. Smith, James Williamson et. al. than their American peers.

period were considered minor. The construction of British cinema offered in French aesthetic film histories may be seen as particularly enlightening in relation to subsequent reactions to British cinema. The crucial role Truffaut's critical perspective has played in helping create negative assumptions cannot be disputed, but evidence clearly suggests that at its beginning and at the height of its popularity, French cinema history already did not see British cinema as worthy of study. It subsequently appears that the influence of Hollywood was seen in direct relation to the denigration of British cinema and its (supposed) badness. The Basic Story which surveyed film history country by country was consolidated by the cine-club movement, archives such as the *Cinémathèque française* and specialist film journals. Having discussed French histories of cinema in general, I will now focus on specific views of British cinema in France

French Histories of British Cinema

French film histories shared a more or less consensual view of the low achievements of British cinema, in that it was largely ignored and overshadowed by the artistic achievements of the American, French, Soviet, Italian and Swedish cinemas that were taken much more seriously as examples of film art. The critical neglect of British cinema was endemic and when we then turn to French historiography on British cinema in the post-war period, there is a surprising dearth of material up until the late 1960s. A slow-build-up of interest can be traced back to *Jeune cinéma britannique*, a study of British films of the 60s by Belgian critic Jacques Belmans, published in May 1967 as

part of the film monthly *Premier Plan*, a publication edited by *Positif* founder Bernard Chardère.³⁵ This "discovery" was supplemented by a 1976 national survey, *Trente ans de cinéma britannique*,³⁶ and, a year later, *L'Angleterre et son cinéma. Le courant documentaire 1927/1965* (1977) published by the bimonthly *Cinéma d'aujourd'hui*³⁷, concentrated on the canonical moment of the British documentary "school" of John Grierson. This sudden enthusiasm for British cinema also coincided with the rise of auteurism. Thus, in Freddy Buache's *Cinéma anglais autour de Kubrick et Losey*³⁸ (1979), the idea of British cinema was conflated with the work of a few *auteurs* including émigrés Joseph Losey, Stanley Kubrick, while the native Ken Loach was singled out for his work. Although initially the canon was confined to Ken Loach, soon, other names were introduced and the monthly *Anthologie du cinéma* produced several monographs, mostly authored by Jacques Belmans, around a handful of individuals such as Anthony Asquith, Robert Hamer, Humphrey Jennings.³⁹

The next account of a specific period of British cinema was Philippe Pilard's *Le nouveau cinéma britannique, 1979-1988*; a study that as its name indicates concentrated its analysis on the British revival during the Thatcher years. However, the year 1996 can be viewed as a landmark year in terms of the French historiography of British cinema with the publication of the first

³⁵ Jacques Belmans, *Jeune cinéma britannique* (Paris: Serdoc, 1967).

³⁶ Roland Lacourbe and Raymond Lefèvre, *Trente ans de cinéma britannique* (Paris: Editions cinéma, 1976).

³⁷ Olivier Barrot, Philippe Pilard, Jean Queval, *L'Angleterre et son cinéma: le courant documentaire* (Paris: Cinéma d'aujourd'hui, 1977).

³⁸ Freddy Buache, *Cinéma anglais autour de Kubrick et Losey* (Lausanne: Editions L'Age d'Homme, 1979).

³⁹ Jacques Belmans, *Humphrey Jennings, 1907-1950* (Paris: Anthologie du cinéma, 1970), *Anthony Asquith, 1902-1968* (Paris: Anthologie du cinéma, 1972), *Robert Hamer, 1911-1963* (Paris: L'Avant-scène du cinéma, 1972).

general historical overview of British filmmaking, *Histoire du cinéma britannique*, also written by the anglophile Pilard.⁴⁰ The subject of British cinema finally reached a general audience with the publication of a collection of essays to accompany the five-months season of 200 British films, *Typiquement British, le cinéma britannique*⁴¹, at the Pompidou centre in Paris, while a few British *auteurs*, Stephen Frears, Mike Leigh, Ken Loach and Peter Greenaway were again admitted to the pantheon.⁴²

It could be said then, that in French critical writings, for a long time, a concern for British cinema was definitely out of fashion. Compared with other national cinemas no strong body of book-length publications on British films and directors existed in French. On the one hand there was a monumental literature on Hollywood and a substantial body of work on French cinema, and a handful of other national cinemas, in particular Italian, Russian, German. On the other, historical silence. It is possible however, that close scrutiny and archaeological work might reveal facts and positions on British cinema much more complex than is usually recognised and that this account might suggest.

Thesis Aims and Structure

My intention in this project is to document in-depth how British cinema has

⁴⁰ Philippe Pilard, *Histoire du cinéma britannique* (Paris: Nathan, 1996).

⁴¹ Philippe Pilard and N.T. Bihn (eds.), *Typiquement British, le cinéma britannique* (Paris: Editions du centre Pompidou, 2000).

⁴² Eithne O'Neill, *Stephen Frears* (Paris: Rivages/Cinéma, 1994), Daniel Caux (ed.), *Peter Greenaway* (Paris: Dis voir, 1987), Michel Cieutat, Jean-Louis Flechniakoska, Peter Greenaway, *Le grand atelier de Peter Greenaway* (Strasbourg: Presse de Réel, 1998), Ken Loach, *Images Documentaires*, 1997, Philippe Pilard, *Ken Loach: Land and Freedom, étude critique* (Paris: Nathan, 1997), Erika Thomas, *Le cinéma de Ken Loach, misères de l'identité professionnelle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), Erika Thomas, *L'univers de Ken Loach, engagement politique et rencontre amoureuse* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), Francis Rousselet, *Ken Loach un rebelle* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2002).

been received in post-war France; whilst an extensive assessment of French writings on British cinema before WWII is outside of the scope of this thesis.⁴³

A critical study of the French reception of British cinema offers an opportunity to examine the interaction of cultural and historical factors in the creation of cinematic reputations and the production of film history. Moreover, such an historical analysis can be used to show how evaluations of films as "good" or "bad" change in relation to different historical contexts and can be seen to perform a specific ideological function at a particular historical moment.

In view of the vastness of the corpus, I will concentrate on key historical moments, aiming to provide an insight into the specificity of the critical construction of British cinema, rather than an exhaustive historical survey. My mode of proceeding is to interrogate exemplary cases and I am also concerned with how the official story represented by Truffaut came to prevail.

In order to investigate the place of British cinema within the cultural politics of French film criticism, I shall seek to document what kind of idea of cinema film critics have constructed and what they have disavowed. This involves, in the first place, investigating a large body of newspaper and journal articles, with particular attention to British cinema but also with a comparative look at writings on other national cinemas, particularly French. The main questions structuring my project will be the constitution of the critical discourses that

⁴³ The development of French film theory and criticism before the essays of André Bazin has been more than adequately covered by Richard Abel. See Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism: a History Anthology, 1907-1939: vol. I 1907-1929* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988); *vol. II 1929-1939* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988).

formed French film culture in both the elite cinephile press and a range of other writings.

One guiding principle of this thesis is to consider critical writings on British cinema as inverted discourses on French cinema, following Thomas Elsaesser, who has contended that national cinema makes sense only as a relational and negotiator of cultural transfers and "exists in a space set up like a hall of mirrors, in which recognition, imaginary status and miscognition enjoy equal status".⁴⁴ My starting point is thus to consider contemporary reviews as a prism through which the identity of French cinema may be articulated or refracted. French critics' accounts of British cinema may thus be seen as saying more, or at least as much about constructions of French cinema and culture as they do about British cinema itself.

This study is divided into four chapters that relate to four distinct periods from the immediate post-war years up to the late 1990s. Although there are no clear-cut dates when one period ends and another begins, such periodisation does enable me to identify broad tendencies in the historical development of French film criticism and to trace general shifts in the French historical and socio-cultural context.

Chapter one lays the foundations of the rest of the thesis in examining the writings of critic and theorist André Bazin and film historian Georges Sadoul in the immediate post-war period, using the critical reception of *Brief Encounter* as a case study. In the light of dominant concepts of realism at the time, such information gives the essential basis for any discourse about cinema

⁴⁴ Thomas Elsaesser, "Putting on a Show: the European Art Movie", *Sight and Sound*, 4, 4, April 1994, 25-6.

in the post-war period; it does not however, in itself, offer a sufficient framework for analysis that accounts totally for the way in which Truffaut would later dismiss British film.

This fundamental question is taken up in chapter two, which focuses on the 1950s and the vilification of British cinema by Truffaut and *Cahiers du cinéma*. The chapter hinges on Truffaut's polemics around the *politique des auteurs* and the advancement of Alfred Hitchcock as a great artist, as a background to understanding his hostility to British cinema.

Chapter three, covering the 1960s and early 1970s, investigates the emergence of an alternative cinephile culture influenced by Surrealism that privileged cinema as the art of the imaginary but one that has been hitherto overshadowed by the widespread attention lavished on the French New Wave. Starting with the legacy of Surrealism, I move on to investigate the cult reception of British horror in the 1960s and suggest that its reception played a central part in the formation of a counter-canon of excluded works to the extent that the "discovery" of *Peeping Tom* may be seen as a transitional moment marking a fundamental shift in the history of the relationship between French critics and British cinema.

The subject of chapter four is the turn-around in the reception of British cinema, with the extremely positive critical appraisal of the "social realist" films of the 1990s, notably the work of director Ken Loach. The chapter looks in particular at the way in which the canonisation of Ken Loach articulated certain anxieties and concerns around French cinema where British cinema was transposed as a desired Other.

This historical approach to the critical reception of British cinema will allow,

I hope, a better understanding of the specificity of French critical writings on the cinema and of the ideological function of criticism. References throughout the thesis are as complete as possible. However, a number of daily and weekly press references do not indicate a page number. This is because they were obtained from the database at BIFI (*Bibliothèque du film*) in which the scanning of articles has deleted page numbers. All translations from the French are mine unless reference is given to a published English version (note that the interchangeable use by French critics of "English" and "British" is reflected in the translation).

Chapter One:

Realism and "Impure Cinema": the Positive Reception of British Cinema after WWII.

Although super-productions such as *The Third Man* or even *Oliver Twist* in which the subtle mix of luxury and intelligence leads nevertheless to cinematographic artifice could make us doubt it, the charm and the qualities of English cinema are decidedly being established every year. Of *The Third Man* or *Brief Encounter*, it is the first that is to the glory of English cinema but the second that gives it its durable, profound and irreplaceable value [...]

Anthony Asquith's *The Browning Version* belongs to this intimist and realist strand of British cinema where directors have extremely successfully combined the qualities of the novel and the theatre, borrowing from the latter the solidity of psychological construction and from the novel the finesse of detail, the efficient presence of concrete and social surroundings. Its theme is both very general and typically British [...]

Anthony Asquith's mise en scene and Terence Rattigan's adaptation of his own play are in the best tradition of English cinema, yet more concerned with human truth than with exterior description. For this reason, the actor never ceases to be at the centre of interest within a mise en scene that presents a rather curious bias for tight framing, closely following the actor, but without sacrificing the general decor of the scenes. In this context I would like to signal the amazing sequence of the cricket game where, although full of dialogues and shot in close-ups, the mise en scene incorporates surroundings which are scattered amidst an immense space.¹

¹ André Bazin, "L'irremplaçable cinéma anglais", *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision*, 85, 2 September, 1951.

Accounts of the history of French film theory and criticism in the immediate post-war period are usually dominated by the critical centrality of Italian neo-realism and Hollywood, while British cinema barely gets a mention. This analysis is in some respects unarguable. The essays of André Bazin that have been collected posthumously in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma* (1958-1962) explore the notion of "classical" Hollywood cinema and the essence of Italian neo-realism.

Yet, Bazin's remark on *The Browning Version* (Anthony Asquith, 1951), quoted above, presents a British film as highly cinematic and conveys some of the extraordinary critical enthusiasm and the explosion of interest that greeted British films when they crossed the Channel immediately after the Liberation. British films were suddenly endowed with an immense prestige and their reputation improved so strikingly with both critics and audiences that it is hardly possible to find an article on British cinema of the time that does not reflect this. In the following section, I will be exploring some of the forms that this critical construction has taken and the reasons for this change of attitude.

The immediate post-war period might be primarily distinguished by its realist approach to cinema and other arts. The experience of the war and of the Occupation had served to valorise the centrality of "truth" and of "the real": whilst the use of visual sources for propaganda during the war forcefully reinforced the ever-present idea in France that film was a powerful tool with a universal, social and educational mission to fulfil. In France, this realist approach to cinema was predominantly marked by the figure of André Bazin. However, Bazin's reflections were also contemporaneous with other approaches that moved in the same realist direction albeit with a dissimilar

agenda, such as those of the film historian Georges Sadoul.

André Bazin and Georges Sadoul were emblematic figures whose works were central to the development and popularisation of film culture in post-war France. Both were concerned with issues of realism in the cinema and wrote about British filmmaking. Georges Sadoul, a Surrealist then a Communist and a member of the Resistance during World War II, is primarily remembered as a film historian, but he was also, like Bazin, a lecturer and a journalist who wrote regularly on individual films and has left a large body of newspaper reviews and journal articles that are scattered throughout the press and remain untranslated. Sadoul developed his thesis about the "Brighton School" of early British filmmakers (a term first introduced by him) during the time of the Occupation and his book on *British Creators of Film Technique* was published by the BFI in 1948.²

The writings of the film critic and theoretician André Bazin give us an insight on a number of developments that occasioned a fundamental critical shift in French film culture in comparison with the pre-war period. Bazin's idea of the ontological nature of cinema was accompanied by his interest in the relationship between film and literature and his idea that film was an "impure" medium that could equal the novel and the theatre. Bazin developed these ideas at a time when some mainstream British films were strongly inflected by documentary realism and when there was also a boom in prestigious literary and theatrical adaptations, an area that was the object of sustained critical

² Georges Sadoul, *British creators of film technique; British scenario writers, the creators of the language of D. W. Griffith, G. A. Smith, Alfred Collins and some others* (London: British Film Institute, 1948).

attention and contributed to the prestige of British filmmaking.

In order to investigate the criteria for evaluating British films from a French perspective and to answer the question of why French film critics thought British cinema ought to be taken seriously during this particular historical moment, the materials with which I will be dealing with will consist mainly of reviews in specialised film journals and both intellectual newspapers and the popular press. As James Chapman has noted reviews are often fruitful for a contextual approach to film history:

Newspaper and magazine reviews are too often neglected by film theorists, perhaps because their approach to criticism seems unsophisticated in comparison to the academic jargon of most scholarly journals, but for the film historian they provide useful evidence of the cultural and intellectual climate within which the films were received, as well as providing a barometer of critical taste.³

The core of this chapter will examine French film culture and criticism after the Liberation and during the Cold War, focusing on the writings of André Bazin and Georges Sadoul and on an examination of how British cinema came to be critically appraised with a case study of the reception of *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945), a film that was firmly established as a masterpiece across the critical spectrum on its release in 1946. A discussion of the reception of *Brief Encounter* will provide a case study in exploring what kind of critical discourses emerged in relation to British cinema and examine what kind of British films French critics most frequently described as "good" cinema both in the mainstream and specialised press.

Before I move on to the case study itself, I will be establishing a broader

³ James Chapman, *Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 17.

context for the discussion, first by considering how film culture evolved in the post-war period, secondly by providing a brief critical history of the shift that occurred within film criticism, a shift which coincided with the controversial return of American films on French screens under the aegis of the Blum-Byrne agreement. This treaty signed in Washington on 28 May 1946, later revised in 1948, was part of the settlement of the French war debt, and granted generous import quotas to American films in return for US imports of luxury goods. During this period, the dominance of Hollywood framed all discussions that were fraught with terms relating to ideas about what a "national" cinema should be. Consequently, there were clear ideological reasons for certain French critics to be more tolerant than usual of British films. The Blum-Byrne agreement elicited highly emotional reactions in professional and critical film circles and inflected French film criticism as ideological battles crystallised around Hollywood cinema. The onset of the Cold War and the perception of a world divided into two distinct ideological camps, also divided French critics between those who increasingly saw Hollywood cinema as an integral part of American imperialism, a bad "other" and those who argued that certain Hollywood productions were indicative of a new "avant-garde" in international filmmaking. In order to understand the impact that British cinema made in France and to arrive at a sense of what was understood by a "good" British film, it is necessary to consider them in the context of the film culture of the time. We shall now turn to the reconstruction of French film culture in the post-war period and how this reconstruction was accompanied with a centralised state support and a change in the social and cultural status of cinema.

The Reconstruction of French Film Culture

The years after the war were characterised by the redefinition of the very status of cinema. French cinema was reconstructed by state intervention and in addition, the period saw the development of a flourishing film culture. Although in the aftermath of the war, French cinema was in a critical condition, major institutional, social and cultural developments contributed to its recovery. Following the August 1944 liberation of Paris, the French film industry was reorganised and film production began again. In 1946, the *Centre National de la Cinématographie*, or C.N.C was created to provide a legislative and financial structure for French cinema, including the principle of a degree of state control, box-office levies and aid to non-commercial cinema. In 1948, the *loi d'aide* was passed, a source of financial aid by taxes levied on box office sales. In 1953, a second *loi d'aide* was adopted, which both maintained automatic entitlement to financial aid for production and exhibition and made provisions to cultural innovations such as the *Cinémathèque Française*, *Ciné-Club* federations and the national film school I.D.H.E.C (*Institut Des Hautes Études Cinématographiques*). The year 1946 even saw the creation of the *Institut de Filmologie* at the Sorbonne University, which was concerned with "*l'étude générale du fait filmique*". With the new laws protecting the national film industry, cinema was thus being recognised as central to French culture and identity and as a creative and artistic medium requiring immediate government action.

The impact of the war had created a strong pedagogical impulse and alongside the reconstruction of French cinema by the state, the idea of the

medium of film as an instrument of popular education made a major contribution to the changing social status of the cinema, the emergence of a new audience and the ensuing development of a new way of receiving film which would flourish in the next decade. Immediately after the Second World War, the desire for "truth" was extremely strong and the interest of critics centred on a cinema of transparency in which the "real" and non-fiction prevailed. As Susanne Langlois has noted, it was firmly believed that film had a social and historical mission to fulfil:

Truth, art and restraint were essential [...] social concern predominated, the discourse was about bringing people closer together - to learn, to discover and to understand the world, and to encourage brotherhood and peace.⁴

The idea of justice and social progress valorised by the spirit of the Resistance were encapsulated in the various undertakings of "cultural democratisation" and education of spectators through the massive emergence of cine-clubs. The aim to inform the public and to incite filmmakers to produce quality film is also visible in this birth of cine-clubs. With the social role and public visibility attributed to culture, conceived both as an instrument of personal emancipation and as a tool for the democratic education of citizens by the French Republic, film education became highly developed. Cinema attendances were extremely high and as television was slow to develop in France, cinema remained the first mass medium, hence its importance in the field of culture and education.

The development of the cine-clubs, which catered for new expressions of

⁴ Susanne Langlois, "Images That Matter: The French Resistance in Film, 1944-1946", *French History*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 461, 466.

curiosity about film also contributed to the strengthening of the place cinema came to occupy within the French intellectual and cultural sphere. The thriving cine-club movement was due in part to the close connection between the cinema and French intellectuals but also to the post-war belief in popular education. The widespread educational and pedagogical impulse in French culture was enabled by the work of organisations devoted to popular education that were particularly sensitive to promoting film as an educational tool (cinema was considered to be such a powerful tool that calls for the moral protection of young people were legislated for in France in 1945). As Fabrice Montebello has noted the cine-club movement was constructed through a matrix that included: the Communists, the Catholic Church and the popular education movement. This common project of education through cinema, was thus on the one hand "inspired by the Communist ideal of the Resistance", and on the other, perceived as a "means to prevent and fight against the fascination of the masses for totalitarian regimes".⁵

The roots of the post-war belief in popular education through cinema actually go back to the period of the Popular Front and to the *Jeune France* movement of around 1941, when some intellectuals called for a "cultural revolution". The *Jeune France* group which had started as a Vichy organisation but became part of the French resistance from 1942 onwards, formed the core of popular education movements such as *Peuple et Culture*, *Travail et Culture*, and *La Ligue de l'enseignement*.⁶ These groups, which were often affiliated to

⁵ Fabrice Montebello, *Le cinéma en France* (Paris: Armand Colin Cinéma), 158.

⁶ Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, "De 1944 à 1958", in Michel Ciment and Jacques Zimmer (eds.), *La critique de cinéma en France* (Paris: Ramsay Cinéma, 1997), 57-88.

churches or political parties gave new energy to the pre-war cine-club movement by organizing screenings followed by debates led by an expert. André Bazin, whose intellectual training was a blend of Catholicism, Catholic inspired philosophy and socialist commitment was a dedicated *animateur* who worked for *Travail et Culture*, taking cinema to factories, trade union halls and cine-clubs, thus contributing widely to the post-war reconstruction of culture.

The powerful *Fédération Française des Ciné-Clubs* was founded in 1945 and placed under the patronage of Jean Painlevé, Georges Sadoul and Raymond Bardonnet, all three Communists. Cine-clubs began multiplying from 1946 onwards and spread to many provincial towns, in factories and universities. The French cine-club movement had a substantial cultural weight and was protected by an institutional framework with the decree of 23 September 1949, allowing these institutions to "spread culture through film".⁷ As Fabrice Montebello has noted, at the time, educating "people" through film meant the cine-clubs, because of their:

Sensitivity to the intellectual elevation of spectators, privilege recognised works whose literary origins often inspire the prestige that is bestowed upon them. The cultural importance of cinema is what in their eyes, justifies favouring singular works with artistic credentials which are closer to European cinema than to Hollywood, except if the latter are the manifest revelation of the original universe of an exceptional artist such as Chaplin or Welles.⁸

The ciné-clubs and their federations published information bulletins that would develop into important film periodicals such as *Ciné-Club*, a trade publication for educators. A similar phenomenon came from the *Ligue de*

⁷ Jeancolas, above cited, 73.

⁸ Fabrice Montebello, "Les intellectuels, le peuple et le cinéma", in Pierre-Jean Benghozi and Christian Delage (eds.), *Une histoire économique du cinéma français, 1895-1995*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), 168.

l'enseignement, which created the UFOCEL (*Union française des oeuvres de cinéma éducateur laïque*) information bulletin in 1946, which was first distributed as a monthly supplement in the specialist film journal *L'Écran français*, later to become part the film journal *Image et Son* in 1951.

Along with the expansion of cine-clubs, the growing interest and cultural significance of cinema was taken up by the written press, which "exploded" after four years of silence (due to censorship during the Occupation). The specialist film press was revived with the emergence of *L'Écran Français* (1943-1953) from clandestinity, *Ciné-club* (1947-1954), *Cinémonde* (1946-1967), *Cinévie* (1945-1948), *Cinévie-Cinévue* (1948-1949), *Ciné-Miroir*, *Votre Cinéma*, *Le Film français* (1944), *Télé-Ciné* (1946-1953), the brief relaunch of the second serie of Jean-Georges Auriol's pre-war journal *La Revue du Cinéma* (1946-48), as well as the extensive "rubrique cinéma" in intellectual journals such as *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, *Arts*, *Esprit*, *Les Temps modernes* and *Les Lettres Françaises*, the major cultural and intellectual journal which originated in the Resistance and, from the end of 1947, would be brought under the control of the Communist Party where cinema was covered first by Roger Leenhardt and then by Georges Sadoul. Growing curiosity in film also infused journalism across the whole spectrum, from the relatively conservative *L'Observateur*, *Le Figaro* and *L'Aurore* to the satirical *Le Canard Enchaîné* to the socially committed *Combat*, a mass circulation newspaper founded and published secretly during the Occupation by Pascal Pia and Albert Camus who remained editor until 1946, and the left-wing *Libération*.

After four years of foreign production having been banned because of the

Occupation, French screens were flooded with not just a plethora of American movies but also a wealth of all kinds of films, French, Italian, and of course, British. The banning by Germany of imports from the United States and the United Kingdom during the war provoked curiosity among French critics about British film production and there was an explosion of interest in British cinema. *Le Film français* wrote of Britain's "example to French cinema"⁹, while the lavishly illustrated popular film periodical *Cinémonde* dedicated a double spread article to British cinema and announced "British cinema is set to conquer the world. The impact of these films is their typically national character" and pointed to *This Happy Breed*, *Brief Encounter*, *Waterloo Road*, *The Way to the Stars* as:

A hundred per cent British school of filmmaking. They speak a language that is sincere, true. British cinema which previously liked to follow Hollywood formulas, is now blooming and has discovered a precious asset: self-confidence.¹⁰

The enthusiasm for British cinema was equally marked in *La Revue du cinéma* where British cinema was also considered to be "one of the highlights of post-war cinema"¹¹, a point which is usually ignored in most accounts of the journal.¹² The brief return of Jean-George Auriol's *La Revue du cinéma*, first published between 1929 and 1931, from 1946 to 1949, set the tone for an aesthetic discourse on film with its attention to the work of major film artists such as Orson Welles, William Wyler and increasingly Alfred Hitchcock, Robert Bresson, Roger Leenhardt and Jean Cocteau, as well as Italian neo-

⁹ *Le Film français*, 26 January 1945

¹⁰ *Cinémonde*, 17 December 46

¹¹ *La Revue du cinéma*, 12, April 1948, 61.

¹² See for instance Antoine de Baecque, *La revue du cinéma, Anthologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), iii-xv.

realism with Roberto Rossellini and Victorio De Sica. *La Revue du cinéma* contained extremely positive and extensive reviews of British films such as *Dead of Night* (Alberto Cavalcanti, Charles Crichton, Basil Dearden, Robert Hamer, 1945)¹³, *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945)¹⁴, *The Rake's Progress* (Sidney Gilliat, 1945)¹⁵, *A Matter of Life and Death* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1946)¹⁶, *Odd Man Out* (Carol Reed, 1947)¹⁷, *They Made Me A Fugitive* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1947)¹⁸, *Henry V* (Laurence Olivier, 1945)¹⁹, *I See a Dark Stranger* (Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat, 1946)²⁰, and *This Happy Breed* (David Lean, 1944).²¹

Post-war French cinema only produced a few films that can be termed realist in comparison with works like Rossellini's *Rome Open City* or propaganda features films such as *The Way to the Stars*. Although René Clément's *La Bataille du rail* (*Battle of the Rail*, 1946), had raised hopes of a realist impulse, French production immediately after the Liberation French cinema was marked by great although not absolute, continuity with the cinema of the Occupation and continued to produce costume dramas which avoided contemporary reality by escaping into the past. Few post-war films took the Resistance as their subject and none addressed collaboration. There was thus a general critical

¹³ Jacques Bourgeois, "Au coeur de la nuit", *La Revue du cinéma*, 1, October 1946, 61-3.

¹⁴ Jean-Pierre Chartier, "Les "films à la première personne et l'illusion de réalité au cinéma", *La revue du cinéma*, 4, January 1947, 32-41.

¹⁵ Amable Jameson (pseudonym of Jean-Jacques Auriol), "Honorable et sans-gêne: un "gilles" anglais", *La Revue du cinéma*, 7, Summer 1947, 62-4.

¹⁶ Jacques Bourgeois, "Un film ambitieux", *La Revue du cinéma*, 7, Summer 1947, 67-9.

¹⁷ Jacques Bourgeois, "Pitié pour les hommes", *La Revue du cinéma*, 8, Autumn 1947, 71-3.

¹⁸ Jean Desternes, "Variations décoratives sur un thème noir", *La Revue du cinéma*, 9, January 1948, 67-9.

¹⁹ Jacques Bourgeois, "A propos d'un chef-d'oeuvre cinématographique", *La Revue du cinéma*, 10, February 1948, 73-7.

²⁰ Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, "I see a Dark Stranger", *La Revue du cinéma*, 12, April 1948, 65-8.

²¹ Jean Desternes, "Chroniques anglaises", *La Revue du cinéma*, 12, April 1948, 61-5.

dissatisfaction with the state of French cinema. André Bazin, for instance, observed that "French cinema would only save itself if it learns how to become even greater by rediscovering an authentic expression of French society".²² In this context, British films which were assumed to have a close contact with contemporary life attracted a great deal of attention and British cinema was often compared to Italian neo-realism. Indeed as *L'Ecran français* critic Jean Queval reflected in 1950:

One of the favourite games of French rhetorical film criticism is to compare the merits of the post-war realist Italian cinema with the British documentary-influenced school [...] It is universally admitted over here that the British make the best films in colour; that the two David Lean adaptations of Dickens are unrivalled 'period' works; that *Dead of Night* is a highly clever film with a style of its own, something, although not epoch-making, to be remembered; that to mention at random, *Hamlet*, *The Red Shoes*, and *A Matter of Life and Death* are worth praise for their experimental contribution to the medium; that *Brief Encounter* has a classical, exemplary narrative value, possibly equalled only in *Le Jour Se Lève* [...] Finally, exoticism explains why the French show sympathy to what is referred to over here as genuine English social realism.²³

However, because of the cachet earned by its clandestine beginnings and a strong Communist presence in the immediate post-war, *L'Ecran français* occupied a central place in French film culture until it folded in 1953. *L'Ecran français* had begun at the end of 1943 as a resistance paper sponsored by committed filmmakers such as Jacques Becker, Louis Daquin, Jean Grémillon and the Communist Party. It was initially allied with *Les Lettres françaises* but after the Liberation took an independent path. Before adopting a Stalinist perspective on cinema, art and politics from 1947 onwards, it hosted a wide variety of highly influential writers. *L'Ecran français* carried the torch for the

²² André Bazin, *French Cinema of the Occupation and Resistance: The Birth of a Critical Esthetic* (New York: Ungar, 1981), 95.

²³ Jean Queval, "France Looks at British film", *Sight and Sound*, volume 19, 5, July 1950, 198.

political left and ideological criteria for judgment of value and the main interests of the journal concerned the internal politics of the French film industry especially in light of the Blum-Byrnes agreements when weekly editorials calling for the renewal of the industry and for action against Hollywood were combined with reports on current productions, reviews of new films, portrait of key personalities, and, more importantly, interviews with directors. *L'Ecran français* was a staunch advocate of French cinema; from 1946 onwards its motto was "The Independent Film Weekly that Defends French Cinema", calling for a closer involvement of the state in the affairs of French cinema. There was a wide coverage of British films in *L'Ecran français* as well as extensive economic reports on the state of the British film industry, especially when the Treasury introduced the Dalton duty in August 1947.

What encouraged a widespread renewal of interest in British film in the 1940s was a search for the legitimisation of cinema by a new generation of critics. One of the important aspects of film criticism of the liberation is that although cinema was generally discussed in terms of realism, there were two particular definitions of realism that provoked debate in the 1940s; aesthetic realism and social realism. Closely tied to the idea that the mission and purpose of cinema was to reflect on contemporary reality, that films should be expressive of the cultural and national identity of their country of origin, there was also an evolving notion of film as a form of cinematic expression equal to others arts. The desire for film to attain the status of literature, theatre, music and the novel was expressed by a new generation of critics, some of whom were also filmmakers such as Alexandre Astruc and Roger Leenhardt. The intense interest in film that was deployed after the Liberation combined a popular

enthusiasm for cinema, symbolised by the blooming cine-club movement, with the progressive structuralisation of a particular intellectual approach to cinema where cinema was slowly being redefined as an art form. Most of the leading intellectual figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean Cocteau were interested in cinema.

For French critics who had spent the war watching French films, there were two crucial revelations: *Citizen Kane* (released in Paris on 3 July 1946), followed in November by the release of *The Magnificent Ambersons* (Orson Welles, 1942) and *Rome Open City* (Roberto Rossellini, 1946), released in Paris on 13 November 1946, followed by *Paisa* (Roberto Rossellini, 1946) on 26 September 1947). French cinema was admired for Robert Bresson's *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* (1945), Jean Renoir's *La Règle du jeu* (1939), and the re-edited and re-released *L'Atalante* by Jean Vigo (1934). These last two films had been banned during the Occupation and they quickly became cine-club classics.

It was the release of a *Citizen Kane* that began to produce a "new criticism" and effected a shift in the way that cinema was conceived and understood. This new direction of French film criticism towards aesthetics and formal analysis was indicated by the initial reactions and the polemics around Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* which opened in Paris in July 1946. The film's release was a major event for Parisian critics and the occasion of the first major critical debates. Jean-Paul Sartre reviewed *Citizen Kane* for *L'Écran français* and expressed certain reservations concerning its overt literariness and intellectualism: "not an example we should follow in France", the film appeared nevertheless to point the way towards a greater psychological depth

in the cinema, "Welles wants spectators to think".²⁴ The discussion around *Citizen Kane* was also taken up by Roger Leenhardt, already an influential figure through his writings on film for *Esprit* during the Occupation years. Leenhardt who had argued that the purpose of film was not that of rhetorical manipulation, but of the transcription of reality, hailed the genius of Orson Welles and the film as an original and audacious social pamphlet.²⁵ The polemic was carried forward through Alexandre Astruc who in 1948 published his famous art cinema manifesto, "*Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde: la caméra-stylo*"²⁶ in *L'Ecran français*, pleading for cinema as an art of personal creation in which the camera would act like a pen. In this article, Astruc suggested that with Renoir, Welles and Bresson, cinema ceased to be a mere spectacle and became a work of art and a form of expression that could compete with French literature and language.

By contrast, in *Les Lettres françaises*, Georges Sadoul had followed Sartre and argued that the film was "an encyclopaedia of outmoded techniques, directed by an artless, impetuous and clumsy beginner".²⁷ The controversy around *Citizen Kane* was also given a new impetus by André Bazin, who in a polemic with Georges Sadoul, argued that *Citizen Kane* marked a turning point in film history because it signalled the arrival of a certain novelistic style in cinematic *écriture*. Bazin like Leenhardt before him and echoing Astruc,

²⁴ "Quand Hollywood veut faire penser ... *Citizen Kane*, Film d'Orson Welles, *L'Ecran Français*, 1 August 1945, in Olivier Barrot, *L'Ecran français, histoire d'un journal et d'une époque* (Paris: Les Editeurs français réunis, 1979), 39-43.

²⁵ Roger Leenhardt . "Le génie d'Orson Welles dans un pamphlet social d'une audace inconnue", *L'Ecran français*, 1946, in Olivier Barrot, above cited, 145.

²⁶ *L'Écran français*, 30 March 1948, translated as "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo", in Peter Graham (ed.) *The New Wave* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 17-23.

²⁷ Georges Sadoul, "Hypertrophie du cerveau", *Les Lettres françaises*, 5 July 1946.

argued that the style of *Orson Welles*, "his way of writing" had allowed him to "reinvent his own cinema, just as Malraux, Hemingway, and Dos Passos reinvent language for their own purposes".²⁸ As a contributor to various publications such as *L'Écran français*, *Esprit*, *Le Parisien Libéré*, *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision* and *l'Observateur*, Bazin reviewed numerous American films which according to him pointed towards a new approach to filmmaking and a new aesthetic, what he would later call "an evolution of the language of cinema".²⁹

While Bazin was interested in the formal and aesthetic aspects of realism, Sadoul advocated a social and political cinema. For Sadoul, more important than analysing the specificity of cinema language was to consider the economics of film and to emphasise the socio-political impact of a film's content and its ideological and moral aspects. Towards the end the 1940s, French film critics became increasingly split into two camps and the debate around realism was mapped onto a debate of form versus content, between aesthetic and political agendas and British cinema mostly succeeded in tapping the diverse constituents of an increasingly divided film culture. The two divergent interpretations of realism in the cinema are perfectly exemplified by the two dominant figures of French film criticism in the post-war period, André Bazin and Georges Sadoul. It is to these polemics and in particular, to the figures of André Bazin and Georges Sadoul that we now turn, focusing on

²⁸ André Bazin, "The Technique of Citizen Kane", first published in *Les Temps Modernes*, 1947, translated from the French by Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo, in Bert Cardullo (ed.), *Bazin at Work, Major Essays from the Forties and Fifties* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 237.

²⁹ André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema", in André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Vol. 1, translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 23-37.

the way in which their respective approaches inflected their reading of British cinema.

The Realist Canon: André Bazin, Georges Sadoul and British Cinema

The reasons for the canonicity of realism are related to criteria that had been in place long before the post-war era. As Richard Abel has argued, a conception of cinema as an instrument of revelation was already enjoying a certain importance in the 1930s. Although French film criticism had been extremely politicised by the growing interest in Fascism and Communism, critics had nevertheless shared a certain common ground around questions of realism and the notion of the *auteur*. Thus according to Abel, in the 1930s, "Georges Sadoul on the left and François Vinneuil on the Right often ridiculed one another's political stance", however, "the best work of these writers and their colleagues, tended, as before, to pass over the mainstream popular films" and to "revolve around one prolific *auteur* par excellence - Jean Renoir - as well as one central concept - realism".³⁰

Although the emphasis on realism and authorship continued unabated in the immediate post-war period, one of the major differences with the earliest film theories of the 1920s seeking to identify the essence of cinema and thus to distance film from the other arts, especially the novel and the theatre, was

³⁰ Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939, Vol. II, 1929-1939* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), 145, emphasis in text.

Bazin's concept of "impure cinema" and his interest in the relationship between literature and cinema. In his article "In Defence of Mixed Cinema", Bazin argued that "the best of recent English films are adaptations of Graham Greene. In our view the most satisfactory is the modestly made *Brighton Rock*, which passed almost unnoticed".³¹

The defence of literary and theatrical adaptations can be related to a desire to legitimate cinema as an art. Closely tied to the idea that the mission and purpose of cinema was to reflect on contemporary reality, that films should be expressive of the cultural and national identity of their country of origin, there was also an evolving notion of film as a form of cinematic expression equal to the other arts. As Alexandre Astruc had noted on the camera-stylo in 1948, the filmmaker would become the equivalent of the novelist. Bazin's interest in adaptation can also be linked to his previous vocation as a teacher and to the cultural politics of France after the Liberation. As Dudley Andrew has shown, in the social and cultural context of the Liberation, and through his belonging to the current of social Catholicism, Bazin was attentive to the popular dimension of cinema, perceived as a privileged instrument for the democratisation of culture. Bazin participated actively to the popular education movement that marked the post-war period in France and expressed a particular interest in the question of contemporary productions of literary and theatrical adaptations:

The real problems to be faced in discussing the theories of such adaptations do not belong to the realm of aesthetics. They do not derive from the cinema as an art form but as a sociological and industrial fact.

³¹ André Bazin, "In Defense of Mixed Cinema", André Bazin *What is Cinema?*, Vol. I, above cited, 64.

The drama of adaptation is the drama of popularisation.³²

Bazin was developing his thesis on "impure" cinema, particularly in reaction to certain works of French cinema such Robert Bresson's *Le journal d'un curé de campagne* (1950) and Jean Cocteau's *Les Parents terribles* (1948), works that had created films with the psychological density of modern literature. André Bazin defended literary adaptations as a paradoxical means of reinforcing cinematic specificity. Taking Bresson as an example, Bazin argued that the most successful adaptations were "a question of building a secondary work with the novel as foundation" and in no sense should the film be "comparable to the novel or worthy of it"; the new work should be "a new aesthetic creation, the novel so to speak multiplied by the cinema".³³ Similarly for Bazin, literature was the driving force behind the new British cinema; it was "by annexing the traditional humour of their literature that British directors have shot up in our esteem"³⁴, he observed, thus responding to emerging arguments around the form and the content of film. The post-war literary adaptation boom in British cinema, which stemmed from a long tradition, thus came at a time when the relationship between cinema, the novel and the theatre were being reassessed. By contrast to the purist and pictorialist aesthetic of the silent-era critics, Bazin argued that cinema's specificity lay in its realist aesthetic committed to story-telling. Reflecting on the historical evolution of cinema and what he called the age of the scenario, he had noted

³² André Bazin, "In defense of Mixed Cinema", 65.

³³ André Bazin, "*Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* and the Stylistics of Robert Bresson", in Bazin, 1967, above cited, 142.

³⁴ André Bazin, "De la forme et du fond ou la "crise" du cinéma, in *Almanach du théâtre et du cinéma*, 1951, reprinted in André Bazin, *Le cinéma français de la Libération à la nouvelle vague* (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque des Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), 362.

how films had become "novelistic".³⁵ This was a view which was also expressed in Claude-Edmonde Magny's 1948 study, *L'Age du roman américain* where the author also traced the influence of film on the American novel and pointed out that recent films had become more literary in their use of flashbacks and first-person narration.³⁶ For Bazin and Magny, cinema had received from literature an impetus towards realism and the two media shared techniques of temporal arrangement and point of view. *Citizen Kane*, for instance, "would never have existed if it had not been for James Joyce and Dos Passos".³⁷ Magny also noted how the movement from the present to the past through the use of ellipsis in American films such as *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons* was also present in recent British films such as *Brief Encounter* and *Dead of Night*.³⁸

With Bazin, this shift to style and to the idea of the director as equal to the writer was accompanied by a renewed emphasis on the inherent realism of cinema which was expressed through new cinematic techniques that enhanced the affinity between cinema, the novel and the theatre as narrative arts:

The deliberate aim here is complete realism, a way of considering reality as if it were homogenous and indivisible, as if it had the same density at all coordinates of the screen.³⁹

Finally, and importantly for Bazin, realism in film was a subjective experience; the relationship between a film and its audience, and thus by implication between the *auteur* of a work, his moral viewpoint, and a viewer.

³⁵ André Bazin, "In Defense of Mixed Cinema", above cited, 53-75.

³⁶ Claude-Edmonde Magny: *The age of the American Novel: The Film Aesthetics of Fiction between the two Wars*, trans. Eleanor Hochman (New York: Ungar, 1972), 21-3.

³⁷ Bazin, "In Defense of mixed cinema", 64.

³⁸ *ibid*, 26.

³⁹ Bazin, *ibid*.

Thus although cinema had a privileged relationship to the real because of the indexical nature of the photographic image as a sign, aesthetic realism was not that which is represented on the screen but, like fingerprints, "the tracings left by reality on celluloid".⁴⁰ Conversely, in his article on *Theatre and Cinema*, Bazin argued that the contemporary "return to filmed theatre" marked

A conquest of realism - not certainly the realism of subject matter or realism of expression but that realism of space without which moving pictures do not constitute cinema.⁴¹

As Dudley Andrew has noted, Bazin tried to establish the importance of several genres which refuse plastic manipulation, remain true to realistic decor, and saw theatrical adaptations as the most powerful example of such films. According to André Bazin, the modern cinema owed a debt to the theatre.⁴² In a two-part essay Bazin also argued that cinema was mature enough to adapt plays without them becoming "filmed theatre".⁴³ Hence Bazin praised Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* for being a purely "cinematic" translation rather than merely an adaptation of Shakespeare's play. Instead of trying to replicate the play, as he noted, Laurence Olivier had succeeded in "resolving the dialectic between cinematic realism and theatrical convention"⁴⁴, finding ways of making film technique adequate to verbal drama. As a result, argued Bazin, the cinema evolved rather than regressed:

Would we dare compare Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* to the, in retrospect, ludicrous borrowings of the *film d'art*? If the problem of filmed theatre has taken on a new lease of aesthetic life it is thanks to films like *Hamlet*, *Henry V* and *Macbeth* amongst the classics [...] Laurence Olivier

⁴⁰ Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 141.

⁴¹ André Bazin, "Theatre and Cinema, Part Two", in *What is Cinema*, Vol. I, above cited, 112.

⁴² André Bazin, "Theatre and Cinema", in Bazin, above cited, 76-124.

⁴³ André Bazin, "Theatre and Cinema", above cited, 76-124.

⁴⁴ Bazin, "Theatre and Cinema", above cited, 88.

succeeded in resolving the dialectic between cinematic realism and theatrical convention. His film begins with a travelling shot, but in this case, the purpose is to plunge us into the theatre [...] He is not pretending to make us forget the conventions of the theatre. On the contrary, he affirms them. In making his film out of a play by showing us, from the opening, by a cinematic device that we are concerned here with theatrical style and conventions instead of trying to hide them, he relieved realism of that which makes it the foe of theatrical illusion.⁴⁵

Reflecting on Italian neo-realism, Bazin did not interpret cinematic realism as a reproduction of the real, which "is satisfied just to present reality".⁴⁶ On the contrary, for Bazin, realism appeared "when inventions and complexity of forms are no longer being applied to the actual content of the work" and when forms (not the invented subject), "do not cease thereby to have an influence on the effectiveness of the means".⁴⁷ Importantly then, realism could refer the viewer back to social realities but it could not reproduce them; ultimately Bazin argued, "realism in art can only be achieved in one way - through artifice".⁴⁸ Thus Rossellini's realism, as Bazin noted "lies not in the subject matter but in the style. Rossellini is perhaps the only film-maker in the world who knows how to get us interested in an action while leaving in its objective context" [...] "Isn't this, then", Bazin added "a sound definition of realism in art: to force the mind to draw its conclusions about people and events, instead of manipulating it into accepting someone else's interpretation?".⁴⁹ We can thus see why Bazin lashed out at Charles Frend's *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948) for its reconstruction of an original event: "The studio reconstructions reveal a mastery of trick work and studio imitation but to what purpose? To imitate the

⁴⁵ Bazin, *ibid*, 88.

⁴⁶ *ibid*, 25.

⁴⁷ *ibid*.

⁴⁸, *ibid*, 26.

⁴⁹ André Bazin, "Germany Year Zero", first published in *Esprit*, 1949, translated in Cardullo, above cited, 124.

inimitable, to reconstruct that which of its very nature can only occur once, namely risk, adventure, death".⁵⁰ In contrast, Bazin devoted a long footnote to *Where No Vulture Flies* (Harry Watt, 1951), a film which he called "an otherwise mediocre English film" in his article "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage", praising an "unforgettable sequence" where "the director abandons his montage of separate shots that has kept the protagonists apart and gives us instead parents, child, and lioness all in the same full shot". This according to Bazin, gave "immediate and retroactive authenticity to the very banal montage that has preceded it". "Here", Bazin concluded, realism "resides in the homogeneity of space".⁵¹ The realism of space, for Bazin, induced an active spectatorship and an active subject, and we can see this theoretical approach in several of the British films he reviewed enthusiastically, for instance in his appreciation of *The Browning Version*, quoted in this introduction. The emphasis on realism meant that those films that appeared to engage with contemporary reality or seemed to aspire towards a closer relation to the real received widespread critical appraisal from Bazin. However, unlike those critics such as Sadoul who defined realism in the cinema through its social content, Bazin argued for the necessity of judging films on the basis of formal and aesthetic criteria.

In 1945, Georges Sadoul had become general secretary of the *Fédération Française des Ciné-Clubs* (F.F.C.L.) and wrote a weekly film review in the Communist *Les Lettres Françaises* that led press campaigns in favour of Socialist Realism. He also contributed to *L'Écran Français* and was professor

⁵⁰ Bazin, *ibid*, 158

⁵¹ André Bazin, "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage", in *What is Cinema, Vol. I*, 49-50.

at the IDHEC film school, vice-president of the *Cinémathèque Française* and president of the association of critics.

As the foremost leftist film critic of his time, Sadoul was highly influential and his political commitment led him to advocate an alternative mass cinema where notions of social responsibility would dominate. For Sadoul, films were potentially active producers of political and ideological meaning. The French Communist Party had become a national political party and, as Laurent Marie has noted, was in line with the Soviet Communist Party whose intellectuals were committed to Socialist Realism. In terms of film as an art form, Social Realism meant, "plots must be objectively set in an historical context and demonstrate plausible characters acting in authentic situation".⁵² Within the context of French film culture this implied "a condemnation of formalism, implying the pre-eminence of subject matter over style, as well as a total rejection of intellectualism".⁵³

In Paris, the intellectual left had remained the most important stronghold of the spirit of the Resistance during the 40s and 50s, and one of their central tenets was a critical attitude towards the United States, even before the onset of the Cold War, which only exacerbated matters. The perceived onslaught of the Blum-Byrne agreements against French cinema provoked deep anxieties about French identity. Its preservation from the threat of American cultural imperialism translated as a defence of French cinema and the *Comité de*

⁵² Irwin M. Wall, *French Communism in the Era of Stalin* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983) quoted in Laurent Marie, "The French Communist Critics and the New Wave", in Elisabeth Ezra and Sue Harris (ed.), *France in Focus, Film and National Identity* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000), 44.

⁵³ Marie, *ibid.*

défense du cinéma français (Committee for the Defence of French Cinema) was established by Jacques Becker and Marcel Carné in December 1947, demanding the revision of the Blum-Byrnes Agreements and increased protection for the domestic film industry.

The adherence to a strict materialist and realist tradition was clearly expressed in *Ciné-Club*, in *Les Lettres Françaises* and in *L'Écran Français* where all the major debates and confrontations took place. Georges Sadoul's patriotism and his economic-determinist approach to cinema also meant that a national cinema was dependant on economic well being to fight against the dominance of Hollywood and to resist what was often characterised as Hollywood imperialism. French cultural nationalism thus drew a clear-cut boundary between high European culture and debased mass American production. In the heavily politicised era of the Cold War, such a critical viewpoint involved promoting one national cinema over another, most often the Soviet over the American, or in the case that concerns us here, British cinema over the American, especially as Britain was perceived to be resisting the onslaught of Hollywood with its new governmental legislation.

For a while British cinema, became a "good" object, acting as a foil to the violence, the vulgarity, the internationalism and debasement of

Hollywood and its adaptations of best sellers [...] Britain gives us what we like so much in its cinema, its concrete taste for the real, its culture, its plastic sense which are in stark contrast with the common flaws of Hollywood".⁵⁴

In this context of fierce anti-Americanism, London became imagined as the anti-capital of Hollywood. *L'Ecran Français* strongly approved of protectionist

⁵⁴ Georges Sadoul, "Hue and Cry", *Les Lettres Françaises* 15 July 1948.

measures adopted in Britain to protect the national film industry; even hoping at some point during the late 1940s that French cinema might be nationalized. Consequently, the implementation of the Dalton Duty in Britain (this embargo ordered a 75% duty on American films entering the British market and had come into effect on 29 August 1947) was reported with great anticipation and they were even calls for such measures to be adopted in France. For Sadoul this also meant opposing the "decadent" production methods of the Hollywood studios and defending enlightened British film producers such as Alexander Korda and Arthur J. Rank:

The films of Korda and Rank are more closely related to the clever realism of *Brief Encounter* than to the stupid American style of *Caesar and Cleopatra* [...] it is the English atmosphere that infuses their films and gives them value. The successes of the English cinema are due to the freedom accorded filmmakers by the great producers. These methods were the glory of Hollywood before its transformation into a sausage factory [...] the English cinema produces already many more remarkable films than Hollywood. It will probably overcome this waning rival. We should hasten to imitate the financial protective measures of the English, dictated by their sense of the national interest. On the other hand, we would be wrong to copy their large production trusts.⁵⁵

In Communist circles, there was a generally widespread reverence for the "classic" works of Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Alexander Dovzhenko and Dziga Vertov whose films were widely circulated around cine-clubs. For Sadoul, what was crucial during this period was not to analyse cinematographic specificity but to underline the social and political impact of a film. This translated as a demand that films should offer socialist political content and use a realistic form. It was also believed that the emergence of a

⁵⁵ Georges Sadoul, "A Londres, où les ménagères préfèrent avoir du pain que des films de Gary Cooper, j'ai vu deux oeuvres de qualité: *"Il pleut toujours le dimanche"* et *"Brighton Rock"*, *L'Ecran Français*, 25 February 1948, 10-11.

European cinema could act as a rampart against American cultural invasion and that such a cinema should not be achieved at the price of diluting national authenticity and identity, but should be defended against "absurd international super productions".

Sadoul's political engagement explains in part his admiration for British filmmakers inspired by the documentary tradition, in contrast with those British directors such as Powell and Pressburger or Carol Reed, who were at the time producing lavish works in glorious Technicolor, or engaged in international co-productions like *The Third Man* (1949). Alexander Korda had managed to repeat his pre-war success of *The Private Life of Henry The VIII* (1938) with the international success of *The Third Man*, one of the biggest commercial successes of the after-war period in France. The film won *The Palme d'Or* at Cannes and the mainstream press responded extremely well to its style. Georges Sadoul however was extremely critical of its success. This was a work of propaganda, of "anglo-germano-austrio-italian-american fabrication", its "impeccable technique [...] had not sufficed to transform it into a work of art".⁵⁶

Sadoul's review of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* (1948) is a particularly revealing example of his dismissal of the issue of style and form as a bourgeois preoccupation. Although he conceded that Powell and Pressburger, in their virtuoso use of colour, were certainly more technically innovative and clever than what was being produced by the "Americans drenched in their coca-cola", the team nevertheless "united a rather decadent

⁵⁶ Georges Sadoul, "The Third Man, film anglo-austro-américain de Carol Reed", *Les Lettres Françaises*, 3 November 1949.

refinement with a tendency to take the easy way out with a luxurious bad taste". Powell and Pressburger were merely "clever and refined men rather than artists" and Sadoul moreover found it highly disappointing that Powell, who had seemed at the beginning of his career "to orient himself towards human and national subjects", should have surrendered to "artificiality and cosmopolitan Hollywood." Sadoul concluded, "We understand why *The Red Shoes* has so much success in the United States".⁵⁷

In contrast, Bazin, for whom the idea of achieving realism through artifice as well as the concept that cinema could enrich all the other arts, did review Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death* (1948) and *The Tales of Hoffman* (1951) relatively positively. In his press article on *The Tales of Hoffman*, an adaptation of Offenbach's opera about German author E. T. A. Hoffman and his stories which won the Special Prize for Originality of Lyrical Adaptation to Film at the 1951 Cannes film festival, Bazin was fairly appreciative of the way in which, with the new techniques developed in the film, other arts could be transformed on the screen and thus enriched by cinema. According to Bazin, Powell and Pressburger had transposed Offenbach's opera to the screen with great originality; the camera movements, the cutting and the camera speed were reflecting the sound and vice-versa in a second order mise-en-scène:

The originality of the film by Emeric Powell and Pressburger [*sic*] is to completely renew the latest techniques of lyrical spectacle [...] The cinema thus creates here a new artistic monster: the best legs adorned with the best voice. Not only is opera liberated from its material constraints but also from its human limitations. Lastly, dance itself is

⁵⁷ Georges Sadoul, "De quelques films britanniques", *Les Lettres Françaises*, 20 July 1949.

renewed by the photography and the editing which allow a kind of choreography of the second degree where the rhythm of the dance is served by that of cinema.⁵⁸

Although he expressed some reservations about *A Matter of life and Death*, especially "its horrid cardboard decor", Bazin's review of the film was again fairly positive, admiring its novel use of colour, the "specific purity" of its British humour; "the long sequence of the heavenly trial [...] is worthy of inclusion in future anthologies of British cinema", he concluded.⁵⁹

In a climate where critics across the political spectrum posited indigenous, authentic European high culture against the "invasion" of mass American products, the championing of Hollywood by Astruc, Bazin and Leenhardt became highly controversial, and Bazin was accused of formalism by critics such as Georges Sadoul. Whereas previously French film criticism had more or less functioned as a close community of readers, as the Cold War advanced, the rift that had started to develop within French film culture on the Blum-Byrne Agreements became more acute. The debate crystallised around issues of realism, form versus content, between aesthetics and social commitment. The onset of the Cold War from 1946 onwards, disturbed the exchanges between intellectuals that were based on a democratic approach to culture. It polarised opinion on film and led to the condemnation in Communist circles of formalism in favour of social realism.

The central role that realism played in all critical discourses thus strongly affected the way in which cinema was embroiled in perception of the national. Moreover, in a post-war film culture pervaded by deep anxieties about an

⁵⁸ André Bazin, "Les contes d'Hoffman", *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision*, 77, 22 June 1951.

⁵⁹ André Bazin, "Une question de vie ou de mort", *L'Écran français*, 116, 16 September 1946.

encroaching "Americanisation", realism functioned as a sign of authenticity. It is thus through the arguments around realism that the renovation of interest in British film primarily occurred and that the first British films to be seen in France won recognition. What proved crucial to the reception of British cinema was that all critics subscribed to a preoccupation with realism, in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of film as an art. They also shared a common interest in the need to nurture a truly French cinema against the hegemony of Hollywood.

Revising the Image: the Discovery of British Cinema

Importantly, then, the image of British cinema evolved because it was increasingly seen as having developed its own distinctive indigenous cinematic tradition. As Bazin noted, the originality of post-war cinema derived from the growth "of certain national schools", such as Italian neo-realism and "a native English cinema freed from the influence of Hollywood".⁶⁰ The first British feature films which immediately re-entered the French market were mostly war films such as *Millions Like Us* (Lauder and Gilliat, 1943), *San Demetrio London* (Charles Frend, 1943), *Target for Tonight* (Harry Watt, 1941), *The Way Ahead* (Carol Reed, 1944), *The Way to the Stars* (Anthony Asquith, 1945), and *Western Approaches* (Pat Jackson, 1944). During the war, British cinema had experienced a coming together of feature and documentary leading to a cycle of fiction films that were rooted in contemporary realities and

⁶⁰ André Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of cinema", above cited, 29.

acknowledged a specific documentary influence. For many British critics in the 1940s, British cinema was experiencing a "Golden Age" with World War II providing the conditions for what was often described as a "quality" cinema. Interestingly, as early as 1937 Cavalcanti, who had worked with the French avant-garde of the 1920s before being called to Britain by John Grierson, had published a pamphlet entitled "*Le mouvement néo-réaliste en Angleterre*".⁶¹ The first substantial critical assessment of British cinema after the war had been a two-part article in *L'Ecran Français* by Jacques Borel published in July 1946. Borel was the pseudonym of the London-based surrealist Jacques Brunius, actor, writer, broadcaster, critic and author of a pamphlet on French cinema⁶² as well as a filmmaker. Brunius had arrived in London in 1938, creating the *London Bulletin* (1938-1940) with the Belgian surrealist E. L. Mesens. As well as being the London correspondent of *L'Ecran Français*, Brunius also reviewed British films for *La Revue du cinéma*; championing the use of colour in Pat Jackson's *Western Approaches* (1944) and in *Steel* by Ronald Riley.⁶³ In his articles for *L'Ecran Français* Brunius argued that the documentary movement constituted an avant-garde which had revolutionized mainstream British filmmaking. For Brunius, the evolution of cinema in Britain was thus characterized:

It is the influence of documentary that has revolutionised the cardboard of the studios. A cinema with a mediocre imagination and artificially imported, needed to be cleansed through the real. First with John Grierson and Alberto Cavalcanti then with Basil Wright, Paul Rotha and the young team that joined them, they have, through documentary, drawn

⁶¹ Alberto Cavalcanti, "Le mouvement néo-réaliste en Angleterre", reprinted in *Positif*, 502, December 2002, 57-59.

⁶² Jacques Brunius, *En marge du cinéma français* (Paris: Arcanes, 1954).

⁶³ Jacques B. Brunius, "Couleur du tragique", *La Revue du cinéma*, 2, November 1946, 13.

up the visual content of the English landscape [...] They would count and sort the human material, searching for social types and diverse ethnic categories. They would experiment with sound, the noise of the coalmine, the rhythm of language, the local accents. They would start from the concrete.⁶⁴

A review of *The Demi-Paradise* (Anthony Asquith, 1944) neatly encapsulates the reversal of attitude that was slowly emerging towards British cinema in France (note how these comments are an uncanny reversal of François Truffaut's scathing remarks, as we will see in chapter two):

We had thought for a long time that British films would never be a national matter, that there was an incompatibility between cinema and the British temperament [...] Today, we must admit that British cinema exists [...] Will its static nature, its slow and overdone expression give British cinema its personal style?⁶⁵

It seems however that not all the propaganda feature films made under Government sponsorship might have been shown. This point has been confirmed by director Nicole Védres writing in the *Penguin Film Review* in 1946:

The only new contribution which might have given French directors something to think about would have certainly been furnished by the English documentaries completed during the war; the work, say, of Paul Rotha, Humphrey Jennings and Basil Wright, but very few of these films have been shown to the French public.⁶⁶

British documentaries must have been shown in private screenings or in cine-clubs since in June 1948 an entire issue of *Ciné-Club*, published in 1947 as the "organ" of the French Federation of Cine-Clubs (president Jean Painlevé, secretary general Georges Sadoul) was devoted to the British documentary

⁶⁴ Jacques Borel, "Une nouvelle école anglaise: du documentaire à la fiction", *L'Ecran Français*, July 46.

⁶⁵ *Cinéma*, 25 June 1946

⁶⁶ Nicole Védres, "The French Cinema since 1944", *The Penguin Film Review*, 1, 1946, 77.

movement. In that issue, Georges Sadoul offered a summary of British film history up until 1948, highlighting the major contribution of documentary realism to British filmmaking. What Sadoul called a "school", the envy of Hollywood, was marked by the presence of *auteurs* and represented a coherent artistic, cultural and truly national cinema, admittedly because it was socially orientated:

1946 was the year of great hopes for British cinema. It emerged from the war with a school of filmmaking with directors such as Alberto Cavalcanti, Anthony Asquith, Thorold Dickinson, David Lean, Powell and Pressburger, Carol Reed, Laurence Olivier and so on [...] The influence of documentary led the new generation [...] towards a firmly national cinema where social comments would not be excluded.⁶⁷

Again, according to Georges Sadoul, *The Way to the Stars* was outstanding because it "owed a lot to the English documentary school" which "proved that during the war English cinema had become first class".⁶⁸ This view was in stark contrast to some of the views expressed before the war such as *La Revue du cinéma* critic Jacques Spitz who in the 1930s had dismissed British cinema as even more backward and contrived than the French:

It's the same woolliness, slightly more pretentious, made a bit more insipid by the respect for conventions. It is always stories about golf, the nursery, and walks under the lilac tree. England, fifty years backward in cinema as in everything else, is still indebted to the theatre.⁶⁹

Now, on the other hand, Britain could be seen as a pioneer in terms of realism. The realist approach in cinema was found in the critical writings of John Grierson that had accompanied the development of documentary filmmaking in the 1920s and 1930s, a movement that defined itself against

⁶⁷ Georges Sadoul. "Les étapes du cinéma anglais", *Ciné-Club*, June 1948, 2, 4.

⁶⁸ *Les Lettres Françaises*, 14 June 1946.

⁶⁹ Jacques Spitz, "Chronique de Londres", *La Revue du cinéma*, 13, August 1930, 72.

Hollywood spectacle and escapism. André Bazin and John Grierson's notion of realism, however, were dissimilar. The contrast between Bazin's account of photographic ontology in the cinema and John Grierson's inspirational notion of the documentary film can be explained by their very different philosophical and cultural backgrounds. Bazin's formation was as a Catholic who had a passion for spreading the benefits of film education. A key dimension of Bazin's formation, according to his biographer Dudley Andrew, was religious and mystical, drawn from the writings of Emmanuel Mounier and the Jesuit priest Teilhard de Chardin. For Bazin, the cinema was one more place for the recognition of the omnipresence of the divine which was suggested by his imagery of the photograph as "the creation of an ideal world in the likeness of the real".⁷⁰ Bazin believed paradoxically that the filmmaker should act as a recorder of the real world, attempting to reveal traces of the real rather than manipulate reality or record it as a didactic illustration of a pre-conceived world-view. The capacity of the image to render visible that which is invisible would thus lead the spectator to form her or his own conclusion and experience the ambiguity of the real. This could be advanced by a film's *mise en scene* (the long take or deep focus, for example), whilst in Bazin's notion of "integral realism" towards which the cinema theologically evolved, montage was a step backward and "forbidden" as the "anticinematic process par excellence".⁷¹ Bazin was opposed to such an approach as self-willed and manipulative, as the imposition of opinion where the filmmakers should stand aside and reveal

⁷⁰ André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image", in André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Vol. 1, translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 10.

⁷¹ "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage", in André Bazin, above cited, 41-52.

reality. Bazin upheld *mise en scene* against montage and his belief that genuine film art derived from a phenomenological rather than analytic approach to the real.

Grierson's position came from sources like H. G. Wells, the Webbs and the Fabians as well as Scottish Calvinism and neo-Hegelianism. His interest in cinema lay in the use of film as a medium for instruction, education and propaganda with the idea that documentary filmmaking could be mobilised and developed as an instrument of public use. In contrast with Bazin, who argued that reality was ambiguous, as the "creative treatment of actuality", documentary could play a civic role, inform and involve the citizen in the general social process: "I look on cinema as a pulpit and use it as a propagandist".⁷² Grierson was significantly influenced by Robert Flaherty and by the principles of symphonic structure and dynamic editing which Russian directors such as Eisenstein had applied for persuasive purposes. The montage theories of Eisenstein and Pudovkin thus led him to lay an emphasis on the interpretative potential of montage editing and to believe in poetic montage.⁷³ Despite their cultural and ideological differences, however, both Bazin and Grierson shared a common belief in the vital role film could play in helping individuals to effect change and achieve self-realisation.

In the 1940s, mogul Arthur J. Rank was the dominating figure of British cinema. Like the producer Alexander Korda in the 1930s, Rank attempted to establish a foothold in the United States, making films that could rival

⁷² John Grierson in Forsyth Hardy (ed.), *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979, 3rd edition), 11.

⁷³ See Ian Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001).

Hollywood, consolidating his vertically integrated organisation along Hollywood lines. Rank also sheltered some of the most prestigious teams in British cinema under the overall organisation of Independent Producers. These were grouped under Cineguild (David Lean, Ronald Neame and Anthony Havelock-Allan), The Archers (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger), Individual Pictures (Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat) and Wessex (Ian Dalrymple). Independent producers' output included many of British cinema's lauded 1940s films such as *Brief Encounter*, *Great Expectations*, *The Rake's Progress* and *Henry V*. Ealing Studios films were also distributed by Rank, but Michael Balcon had nevertheless complete autonomy. At Ealing studios, producer Michael Balcon had called for a realist cinema, recruiting Harry Watt and Alberto Cavalcanti and creating a distinct studio style which emphasised "realism" over "tinsel" in films that should be "projecting Britain and the British character". The documentary movement had a direct impact on Ealing in a process of "cross-fertilisation" initiated by Michael Balcon. By the end of the 1940s, the Rank organisation was in serious financial trouble. In 1947, the Treasury, faced with a crisis, announced a duty of 75 per cent on all films from America. In retaliation, the Motion Picture Association of America placed an embargo on the export of new films to Britain which was eventually lifted in 1948. By 1949, Independent Producers had broken up and directors lured away by Alexander Korda. As a period of retrenchment came for the Rank Organisation, Alexander Korda acquired British Lion, the third largest British distribution company in Britain. His most prestigious recruit was Carol Reed and in 1949, he produced *The Third Man* with David O Selznick, whilst the same year three Ealing comedies were released in France. With *Passport to*

Pimlico (Henry Cornelius), *Whisky Galore!* (Alexander Mackendrick) and *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (Robert Hamer), there developed a vogue for British humour. According to one British critic,

Whisky Galore and *Passport to Pimlico* each became overnight the talk of Paris, and highbrows and lowbrows unanimously asked: Why on earth haven't the British shown us their humour on the screen before?⁷⁴

Ealing comedies produced under Michael Balcon were received as a specifically British tradition that confirmed a certain image of British cinema as social realist. Thus, Bazin praised *Passport for Pimlico* as "a masterpiece of British humour" which showed that British cinema alone was capable of pulling off such a subject. "Paradoxically", Bazin argued,

It is in its social realist genre, in its art of the true detail, considered here within a traditional Swiftian sense of humour and satire, that allow us to believe in this social fable.⁷⁵

For Jean-Pierre Chartier (writing under the pseudonym of Jean-Louis Tallenay), this was an extremely "good example of a typically national film, where although all the details are properly English, its interest and impact are international."⁷⁶ In the early 50s Bazin also admired *The Lavender Hill Mob* (Charles Crichton, 1951), even arguing that this cycle of British comedies was on the way to surpassing American comedies.⁷⁷

In France, the common frame of reference for Catholicism and the Socialists with the two other currents of thought emerging from the Resistance, Marxism and Existentialism, was a general acceptance of the notion of "humanism".

⁷⁴ Francis Koval, "British Films in Europe", *Sight and Sound*, vol. 19, 12, April 1951, 10.

⁷⁵ André Bazin, *Passeport pour Pimlico: un chef-d'oeuvre d'humour anglais*, *Les Lettres françaises*, 12 December 1949.

⁷⁶ Jean-Louis Tallenay, "*Passport pour Pimlico*: réussite de l'humour anglais", *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision*, 5 February 1950.

⁷⁷ André Bazin, "De l'or en barre", *Radio-cinéma-Télévision*, 6 January 1952.

According to John Ellis, a similar notion inflected British critical discourses where "a humanist conception of mankind was central".⁷⁸ Similarly, the imagining of America by British intellectuals such as Georges Orwell also posited Hollywood as a threat to cultural values in what they saw as a process of Americanisation. In the realm of British film culture this translated into the dominant critical discourse of the time which in order to foster a national cinema, endorsed realism, authenticity, restrained visual appearance and sincerity in opposition to Hollywood tinsel and entertainment values.⁷⁹ The critical emphasis on realism thus encouraged the production of "quality" films and the early part of the 1940s was seen by British critics of the time as a golden age. This polarised British cinema into "quality" realism versus "Gothic excess" and alternative styles of filmmaking such as Gainsborough Studios historical melodramas (*The Wicked Lady*, Leslie Arliss, 1945) and Technicolor melodramas such as *Black Narcissus* (Powell and Pressburger, 1947) were more or less relegated (as we will see in chapter three) to critical oblivion.

Brief Encounter illustrates particularly well the desire for the values of "truth", "authenticity" and humanism that generally inflected both French and British film culture in the 1940s. Importantly, it was the release of *Brief Encounter* that convinced French critics that British cinema was experiencing a renaissance in filmmaking:

There are in England two principal tendencies. The first has recently led to *Caesar and Cleopatra* [...] costing over 1000 million francs. The director Pascal has crushed Bernard Shaw's humour under an abundance

⁷⁸ John Ellis, "The Quality Film Adventure: British Critics and the Cinema, 1942-1948, in Andrew Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), 73.

⁷⁹ Ellis, *ibid*, 74.

of decor, of cardboard, of extras [...] It was a failure [...] The other tendency [...] the documentaries have profoundly influenced the best directors [...] *Brief Encounter*, one the greatest recent British films, is obviously heavily indebted to them.⁸⁰

In France, at a time when cinema was crucially invested with national cultural significance, the cinema that was sanctioned culturally and critically was a cinema that stayed close to its national and ethnic sources. British cinema's national specificity came to be defined like that of the "Italian school" in terms of realism and authenticity and I argue that this theme is crucial for an understanding of the critical reception of British cinema in the immediate post-war years, which was characterised by debates around realism. A key film that articulates this theme is *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945). In addition, the favour with which *Brief Encounter* was greeted, following the lukewarm critical reaction to British films before the war, suggests that French critics were more receptive to British cinema than has generally been perceived.

***Brief Encounter* and its Critical Reception**

Brief Encounter is the story of Laura Jesson (Celia Johnson), an ordinary middle-class housewife who contemplates having an extra-marital affair with a doctor, Alec (Trevor Howard). The film is structured around Laura's monologue and therefore narrated from her subjective point of view. The voiceover monologue dramatically explores her emotional turmoil, her feeling of shame and how she is torn between her safe home life and the lure of romance. The drama is anchored in everyday surroundings by the setting of the

⁸⁰ Raymond Barkan, "Eessor du cinéma anglais", *Les Lettres Françaises*, 24 May 1946.

railway station and various location shoots that evoke the ordinariness of small-town life. Released on 8 May 1946 in Paris, *Brief Encounter* was instantly hailed as a realist masterpiece across the critical spectrum. It won a Golden Palm in September 1946 at the Cannes film festival (attributed conjointly to eleven countries such as Italy with *Rome Open City* and France with *La Bataille du rail* and this prize gave concrete expression to the idea that British cinema now existed. As the popular film magazine *Cinévie* reported in its review, "today British cinema exists".⁸¹ The consensus around the film gives us further insights about horizons of expectations and indicate how deep the idea of realism was at the time, as certain meanings were foregrounded. French cinephiles and mainstream critics alike were united in their appraisal of the film although the film seemed to have been read rather differently by provincial French spectators.

According to one British critic writing in the early 1950s:

While in intellectual Paris everyone was very enthusiastic about this admirable picture (and still is, incidentally), the average small-town Frenchman shook his head and mumbled: 'Not a bad picture, but what a lot of fuss these English make about a little love affair'.⁸²

This review in the left-leaning daily *Libération* encapsulates well the mood of the time: "*Brief Encounter* is the film that corresponds exactly to our expectations of cinema at the moment: to be simple and true".⁸³ The critical reception of the film primarily revolved around its perceived realism, which in itself was seen as innovative as Italian neo-realism by its integration of a fictional narrative within a realist context. The force of the "real" was vividly

⁸¹ 17 Septembre 1947.

⁸² Francis Koval, "British films in Europe", *Sight and Sound*, vol. 19, 12, April 1951, 11.

⁸³ *Libération*, 23 November 1946.

demonstrated by the critical reception of Italian neo-realism in France. Although the films were not particularly successful at the box-office, they nevertheless represented an ideal cinema, a cinema which had revolutionised the Cannes film festival and whose humanism, moral force and authenticity was understood in terms similar to those of André Bazin. This was also in stark contrast with Hollywood hyperbole and French cinema which had disappointingly not experienced the same relation to the real. As Georges Sadoul reflected in *L'Ecran Français*,

Compared with these films, French cinema is hiding behind history or the novel and is tainted by academicism, while American cinema is like a hot-house plant; cut off from nature and life".⁸⁴

According to Sadoul *Brief Encounter* was a "perfect film" and the flagship of a new "good" British cinema:

There is a type of British cinema which matters today, and *Brief Encounter* proves it [...] Not a single aspect of the film is untrue, whereas, by comparison, everything rings false in *Mrs Miniver*, despite William Wyler's talent [...] *Brief Encounter* gives us the everyday, the authentic, true England, even though the small country town and the railway station are only suggested by light, discreet touches [...]

The style of *Brief Encounter* is an illustration of the good contemporary British cinema, which contrasts with the gigantic, so-called international "wedding cakes", which today are fashionable, and of which the catastrophic *Caesar and Cleopatra* is a prototype. The British documentary school, that of Grierson, Basil Wright, Cavalcanti and Paul Rotha - taught filmmakers, even theatre people like Noel Coward, the importance of socially-anchored human types, of accurate details, of proper locations, of ordinary faces [...]

Submission to the real is one of the golden rules of the great British film, and what gives them value. It is in this sense that *Brief Encounter* can be compared to Roberto Rossellini's *Rome Open City* and *Paisà*. And yet these two directors' approaches are diametrically opposed. Rossellini works like a photo-reporter, seizing life on the run, and asking his characters to re-enact an authentic episode, which they lived through (or could have lived through) in the past. Noel Coward and David Lean, on the contrary, work almost exclusively in the studio, in specially

⁸⁴ Georges Sadoul, *L'Écran Français*, 72, 1946, 19.

constructed sets, and with admirably trained actors. This is evident when watching Celia Johnson's face - a face which is neither young nor conventionally pretty, but whose expression, at each instant, expresses both truth and professionalism.

If Rossellini and Coward, these two absolute opposites, can be spoken of in the same breath, it is because they use different methods in the service of the same aesthetic, realism.⁸⁵

The background of ordinary events, the portrayal and social situatedness of everyday characters and the description of authentic emotions were seen as a realistic portrayal of an authentically British subject matter that owed a debt to the documentary movement. Critics were ecstatic. For Jean Queval it was, "a work that honours cinema"⁸⁶, whilst for the Communist *L'Humanité* it was "one of the masterpieces of contemporary British cinema [...] never had psychology reached such realism".⁸⁷

Most mainstream critics made a point of distinguishing between routine cinematic productions (from Hollywood) and artistic innovations (from Europe). For Jean Fayard in the right-wing *Opéra*:

The characters of this British film are more substantial than American heroes, usually quite frivolous. The conscience of old Europe lay on their shoulders [...] The film is played against all American conventions, by two actors who are the least star struck.⁸⁸

Whilst for the Communist critic Raymond Barkan in *Action*, the film was of even better quality than the work of Orson Welles: "Technique is never an end in itself as it appears with Orson Welles. A British film right down to its smallest details".⁸⁹ Moreover, with this film, Europe was also fighting back

⁸⁵ Georges Sadoul, "Le cinéma anglais ou la soumission au réel", *Carrefour*, 28 November 46

⁸⁶ *L'Ecran Français*, 26 November 1946.

⁸⁷ 27 November 1946

⁸⁸ Jean Fayard, "Brève Rencontre", *Opéra*, 27 November 1946.

⁸⁹ Raymond Barkan, "Brève rencontre", *Action*, 6 December 46.

against the new world of Hollywood: "What is most interesting about the phenomenon of *Brief Encounter*, is what we may call the expansion of national cinemas [...] Europe is fighting back against Hollywood".⁹⁰ For the Communist daily *Libération* *Brief Encounter* was not even a fictional story but,

A slice of life that David Lean has detached from daily reality. It is infinitely more beautiful than any fruitless story Hollywood sends us [...] Never has British cinema given us a work so *pure*, so just, so human, so moving. My colleagues and I would be happy if the public were to confirm our judgement and prove that whatever certain distributors and exhibitor may say, the public knows how to distinguish cinematic art from filmed grocery.⁹¹

The image of Celia Johnson gave *Brief Encounter* an added sense of "national essence" and national identity was a central discourse through which critics evaluated stars. Celia Johnson's Britishness was articulated through notions of respectable female sexuality epitomizing a particular aspect of nationhood, a kind of English archetype whose "Britishness" was expressed through her acting style and ability, her more "authentic" persona, which differentiated her from Hollywood's stars and their international standards of glamour. The actress thus functioned as an articulation and signifier of British national identity. She was a symbol of the national and represented "Britishness". The fact that she was not very young, not pretty, not *coquette*, in short "ordinary" and not glamorous lend a further sense of authenticity to the film in contrast with the more overt female sexuality and perceived eroticism of Hollywood. Thus the weekly *Cinévie* stressed her ordinariness, noting how "a woman like any other has supplanted the pin-up girls".⁹² Such national

⁹⁰ François Chalais, "*Brève rencontre*", *Carrefour*, 28 Novembre 46.

⁹¹ Anon, "*Brève rencontre*", *Libération*, 23 November 46, emphasis in text.

⁹² *Cinévie*, 16 November 1946

attributes were crucial in the agitated period of the Cold War and *L'Ecran Français* dedicated a second feature profiling Celia Johnson as a reference point; a clear example of the opposition between Europe (as truth and authenticity) and America (as vulgar, false and inauthentic). For Raymond Barkan in *Spectateur*,

We have a real debt of gratitude to express towards the cinema from England. Since the war, it has given us something rare: truthful films. Celia Johnson [...] her beauty is of a different essence than that of those who run around Miami or in the piscine Molitor [N.B. a swimming-pool located in the exclusive 16th arrondissement in Paris]. This kind of beauty needs no make-up, swimming costume or fur coats. It is the expression of a kind of fair play of the soul which emerges under the most tarnished traits like a pure kind of water.⁹³

Meanwhile, Jean Nery in *L'Ecran français*, talked of Celia Johnson as

Having as much sophistication as bacon and eggs, Celia Johnson is a happy housewife [...] She does not try to emulate the *femme fatale*, she does not even need to be rescued by the best make-up artists 'in the world' [in English in the text].⁹⁴

There was, however also a certain amount of admiration for other formal aspects of the film amongst French film critics; its narrational device was perceived as daring and original. Sacha Guitry's 1936 *Le Roman d'un tricheur* (*The Story of a Cheat*) which eschewed dialogue in favour of a non-stop voiceover commentary by the central character (played by Guitry himself) was dutifully ignored, no doubt because of his lack of commitment during the Occupation. Guitry's come-back to cinema was viewed with a certain revulsion in *L'Ecran français*. The use of voiceover narration was considered to be an important cinematic innovation (*Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent*

⁹³ Raymond Barkan, "Celia Johnson, l'actrice la plus humaine de l'écran: la beauté qui vient du coeur", *Spectateur*, 28 January of 1948

⁹⁴ Jean Nery, "Une mère de famille qui soigne son enfant et cultive son jardin, Celia Johnson, la grande interprète de *Brève rencontre*", *L'Écran français*, 75, 3 December 1946.

Ambersons had also used voiceover narration) and a sure sign that cinema had evolved and should be taken seriously. The critic Jean-Pierre Chartier dedicated an extended article on first person voiceover narration in *La Revue du cinéma* in 1947 in which he argued that *Brief Encounter* was exemplary in this domain, "perhaps the most important innovation in the use of language in cinema". According to Chartier, with its novelistic technique of first person narration from the beginning to the end of the film, *Brief Encounter* had heralded a new kind of psychological realism in cinema. The subjective commentary was not, as in most films relying on the same device, used to show what had happened in the past; in *Brief Encounter*, it was used in the present, "inscribed in the reality of things, in the drama, in the present of the action, on the same level as the gestures and the words of the characters." Chartier also argued that first person narration which had only been used in the novel previously, added a new psychological dimension to cinema. Thus, according to Chartier *Brief Encounter* was a landmark in the history of cinematographic means of expression because it was "the first film to use a first person off-screen monologue from beginning to end to translate directly the thoughts of the principal character" and therefore furthered cinematic art "in its march towards the total illusion of reality".⁹⁵ It is also for this innovative narrational mode that the filmmaker Jean-Pierre Melville would later still consider *Brief Encounter* as "a pure masterpiece [...] the most authentically cinematic work of the last five years".⁹⁶ This narrative style was seen as highly

⁹⁵ Roger Chartier, "les "films à la première personne et l'illusion de réalité au cinéma", *La Revue du cinéma*, 4, January 1947, 32-41.

⁹⁶ *L'Ecran Français*, 4 mai 1949.

innovative because it translated a form of realism which was highly subjective:

What gives *Brief Encounter* its originality, and what allows it to rise above most British films, putting it immediately within the great landmarks of the future, is the narration process. The indirect narration takes the form of an imaginary confession, which seamlessly integrates direct narration and borrows its effects from the [literary] stream of consciousness [...] Performances are throughout intelligent, moving, perfect. And, ladies and gentlemen, pay attention! This is an amazing lesson for Hollywood! There is not a pretty woman in sight, and not a single person of international reputation.⁹⁷

Thus a critic in *La Défense* argued such works showed that the image (as effectively as the words of the novelist and the playwright) is a language that can express everything⁹⁸ whilst Georges Charensol in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* compared the film to avant-garde "classics" of European art cinema such as Carl Theodor Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* and Robert Bresson in *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne*.⁹⁹ In *Cinémonde* Jacques-Doniol Valcroze called it, "a unique and certainly novel film, opening previously unforeseen new ways in cinema"¹⁰⁰ whilst for Robert Chazal in the following issue of the journal, it was also a proof that British cinema was coming into its own; "the only cinema that could produce such masterpieces".¹⁰¹ Lastly, for a representative of the emerging "new criticism" such as Alexandre Astruc:

What one might call pompously a classical work has just been born on the screen [...] The gap between the dream and reality is never indicated by those so-called visual means that make those silent cinema faithful hurl with joy, but by a judicious use of decor.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Jean Queval, *L'Écran français*, 74, 26 November 1946.

⁹⁸ Robert Blondini, "Un langage qui peut tout dire", *La Défense*, 6 December 1946.

⁹⁹ Georges Charensol, "Brève rencontre", *Les nouvelles littéraires*, 28 November 1946.

¹⁰⁰ Jacques-Doniol-Valcroze, "Brève rencontre", *Cinémonde*, 19 November 1946.

¹⁰¹ Robert Chazal, "Brève rencontre", *Cinémonde*, 3 December 1946

¹⁰² Alexandre Astruc, "Brève rencontre", *Spectateur*, 3 December 1946

As with any film where a certain representation of the "real" was detected, *Brief Encounter* was taken as being part of the move of cinema towards greater realism. The innovative process of narrative construction as a voiceover also contributed to this effect, furthering access to the inner reality of emotions. This method of narration could yield an emotional experience and allowed an even deeper level of realism to be attained; it felt like "real life". As Claude-Edmonde Magny had noted,

The aesthetic effect of the first-person narration is evident. With it, we break with the film's spectator's hitherto impersonal - as well as false and abstract - vision, and arrive at an apprehension that more closely approaches the normal conditions of perception. At the same time the narrative [...] has the same force as the testimony of the witness.¹⁰³

In this context, it is also interesting to emphasise the attitudes of British critics in contrast to the French. The *Monthly Film Bulletin* equated *Brief Encounter* with French cinema: "it would be difficult to find a more profound study of love outside the French cinema", concluding that it was "a poet's film, harsh, cruel and lovely".¹⁰⁴ In *The Cinema* it was classified as "a romantic drama"¹⁰⁵ and in the trade journal *Kinematograph Weekly* described as "a brilliant psychological study".¹⁰⁶ The critical reaction in *Documentary Newsletter* however was strikingly different; the organ of documentary filmmakers rejected the film as "a sorry affair" where a "slight story of two middle-aged people in search of a bed became vaguely comic instead of being

¹⁰³ Claude-Edmonde Magny, above quoted, 25.

¹⁰⁴ *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 12, 14, 31 December 1945, 145

¹⁰⁵ *The Cinema*, 14 November 1945, 12.

¹⁰⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly*, 15 November 1945, 41.

noble or pathetic. The comedy sequences were particularly inept".¹⁰⁷

Reading these reviews, we can see how reception is nationally and culturally bound. In France, *Brief Encounter* not only combined all the elements that made for good cinema and were considered to be furthering cinematic art after the "revelation" of *Citizen Kane* and *Rome Open City*, but also, and more crucially, the "realist" belief meant that at the time of its release, *Brief Encounter* was critically perceived as a documentary-inspired realist film.

In many ways, *Brief Encounter* provides a perfect example of a film which was invested with meaning by a community of readers with certain expectations and interests. Such expectations and interests determined the way in which *Brief Encounter* was received. The main factor was the issue of realism and it is possible to argue that *Brief Encounter* contributed to French critical discourses on realism in the cinema at the time. Realism was also mobilised to define the national of British cinema as critical discourses about truth and authenticity ineluctably framed the "national" against the internationalism and dominance of Hollywood. What seemed realistic was most noticeable in relation to the theme and the iconography of the film. The decor, as well as the authenticity of place and character, the setting and the image was seen as an important iconographic signpost of the representation of the everyday. As Richard Dyer has noted, "*Brief Encounter* has always been regarded as a quintessentially British film, typical of British cinema and of Britishness itself". However, Dyer also makes the point that "the hidden point of reference in most discussion of the film is melodrama" and that importantly

¹⁰⁷ Anon, *Documentary Newsletter*, 1945, 10.

part of *Brief Encounter*'s realism "has to do with distinguishing itself from a culture that is both popular and female, a conflation common in accounts of mass culture".¹⁰⁸ This in part explains the French critical enthusiasm which, as we have seen, was closely related to ambivalent feelings towards the American mass culture represented by Hollywood. Additionally, it must be noted that these critics participated in the tacit assumptions of their gender as the film's melodramatic mood was excluded from their analysis, therefore giving further weight to realist assumptions and expectations. The fact that they never seemed to have noticed this aspect of the film was typical of the cultural blindness of most French critics and to the predominant misogyny of French culture more generally. Such a lacuna is not surprising given the forceful return of patriarchal values following the Liberation when despite women's role as workers and often as Resistance-fighters during the war (and having been granted the vote in 1944), the period after the Liberation, as Burch and Sellier have noted, "was to mark the beginning of a highly conflictual period in male-female relationships fuelled by a new major male anxiety: would women be willing to resume their roles as housewives?".¹⁰⁹ In this context, the great emphasis on realism and on Celia Johnson's "normality" was undoubtedly linked to the post-war drive to return women to the home and to occlude their key role in the war, notably in the resistance. The ending of *Brief Encounter* which sees Laura return to the home as a housewife and mother, might have offered these (mostly) male critics a reassuring confirmation of woman's

¹⁰⁸ Richard Dyer, *Brief Encounter* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), 51.

¹⁰⁹ Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier, "Evil Women in the Post-war French Cinema", in Ulrike Sieglöhr (ed.), *Heroines Without Heroes. Reconstructing Female and National Identities in European Cinema, 1945-1951* (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), 48.

traditional social role in the home and as the return to normality and stability that had been lacking in the war years.

Conclusion

As Roger Chartier has argued, while texts retain a certain textual specificity, "the meaning attributed to their forms and themes depend upon the areas of competence or the expectations of the various publics that take hold of them".¹¹⁰ French critics brought their understanding of Italian neo-realism and Hollywood to bear on their interpretation of British films and compared themes and forms. Defining national cinema meant contrasting one national cinema to another and Hollywood was one important term within a system of differences. The elevation of British cinema against the American bore the mark of the historical position of critics in the post-war period as British cinema was also often mobilised as a strategy of cultural and economic resistance in the face of Hollywood's domination. The success of Hollywood films and their market dominance posed a threat to French cultural identity and this critical reception obliquely reflected specific concerns about high and mass culture, national identity and the threat of Americanisation. British cinema gave weight to the gradual discursive formulation of cinema as a cultural process comparable to literature and the other arts. However, as French identity was mainly defined by distinguishing itself from the "Other" of America, when British filmmakers began to make films with American

¹¹⁰ Roger Chartier: *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans Lydia G. Cochrane, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), x.

funding, their films lost their cultural authenticity and thus national identity to become part of the Anglo-Saxon threat and that of the erosion of the distinction between high and mass culture.

In the post-war period, *auteurs* were already deemed as expressive of the national culture and national cinemas were largely organised in terms of a literary conception of "great works" by "great authors". In terms of national cinema, *Brief Encounter* was historically framed as a continuation of the tradition of the British documentary movement that had come to represent a fundamental aspect of the development of cinematic art in Britain. Generally, as the reviews show, it was agreed that *Brief Encounter* was art, indicating new possibilities and hoped-for aspirations, but more importantly through its projection of an intrinsic "Britishness".

The critical appraisal of the genre of literary and theatrical adaptations by André Bazin however shows that "good" British cinema, of which literary and theatrical adaptations were a symbol, possessed a certain cultural cachet and appealed strongly to a middle-class audience. One particular theme that will carry forward into the next chapter is the critical response to literary adaptations. Despite Bazin's engagement with popular and quality filmmaking and adaptation, Bazin had written the first auteur study with his Orson Welles in 1950 and generally dedicated his most serious articles to independent figures such as Jean Renoir or Robert Bresson. In *Cahiers du cinéma*, the journal Bazin co-founded in 1951 with Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Lo Duca, one of the building blocks of *the politique des auteurs* would be to mount vicious attacks of the practice of literary adaptation as the focus on the director would be radicalised to become the dominant critical paradigm, explicitly evading the

democratising visual principles outlined in Bazin's writings. As *Cahiers du cinéma* transformed itself into a militant magazine for the future directors of the New Wave in the mid-50s, the enthusiastic reaction of the early period of "discovery" of British cinema was drastically overturned. It is thus to the demonisation of British cinema by François Truffaut and the New Wave in the 1950s that the next chapter will now turn.

Documents

"Brève Rencontre"

"[...] Pour traditionnelle qu'elle soit en apparence, cette intrigue romanesque obéit toujours aux lois que le cinéma britannique s'est donné depuis qu'il a rompu avec Hollywood et dont *Ceux qui servent en mer* - également de Noël Coward et David Lean-*L'Héroïque Parade* (*The Way Ahead*), *Missions secrètes* (*Western Approaches*) et le *Coeur captif* sont des modèles achevés. Ces lois sont essentiellement celles de la soumission au réel: les détails sont si bien choisis, si évocateurs que toute transposition conventionnelle (du type de Mrs. Miniver) nous semble, par comparaison, insupportable: en quelques images, la petite ville de *Brève Rencontre* nous livre tous ses secrets....[...]

Pour qui ne voit que l'apparence un tel film peut paraître aussi privé que possible d'originalité ; mais qui va au delà se trouve devant une oeuvre d'une extrême audace car le cinéma se mesure ici avec le plus évolué de tous les arts, avec l'art littéraire, et il n'est pas douteux qu'il le surclasse: jamais un romancier ne parviendrait à traduire une même action vue d'abord par un spectateur indifférent, puis par l'héroïne elle-même, avec une vérité à celle que nous reconnaissons dans la scène bouleversante du suicide manqué, scène esquissée au début du film et dont seules les ultimes images nous livrent le secret [...]

Oui, certes, une grande, une très grande oeuvre et qui, à tous ses mérites ajoute celui d'ouvrir au cinéma britannique une porte sur l'avenir [...]"

Georges Charensol, *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 28 November 1946

"Brève Rencontre: le meilleur des films anglais"

"[...] Ce qui fait l'originalité du film et ce en quoi il dépasse les qualités communes à presque toutes les oeuvres anglaises, ce qui le classe d'emblée dans les anthologies future. c'est le procédé de la narration.

Le récit indirect [...] emprunte la forme d'une confession imaginaire, où il intègre le récit direct à la perfection et où il emprunte ses effets les plus surs au monologue intérieur [...]

La collaboration de l'écrivain Noël Coward et du cinéaste David Lean est admirable: ils sont parvenus à nouer l'argument dans un style de contrepoint qui conjugue infailliblement l'emploi de la parole et l'emploi de l'image et qui, selon moi apporte une réponse définitive aux querelles abstraites qui opposent les théoriciens du muet à ceux du parlant.

La narration se recommande encore pour d'autres mérites. La vie quotidienne de l'Angleterre, plus que présente, obsédante, est l'arrière plan parfait de l'intrigue. Les décors ... sont d'un réalisme implacable et d'une surprenante *absence*, tant ils sont fondus dans l'histoire, tant ils sont un *peu de l'histoire même*".

Jean Queval, *L'Ecran français*, 74, 26 November 1946.

CARREFOUR
28-11-46

Page 8

PAR GEORGES SADOUL

LE CINEMA



LE CINEMA ANGLAIS

ou la soumission au réel

DANS le buffet d'une gare de jonction, un homme rencontre une femme. Tous deux sont mariés, ils ont plus de quarante ans, ils ont des enfants. Ce qui n'empêche pas que l'amour, le grand amour, les prenne et bouleverse leur vie. Menace de la bouleverner, plutôt. Après quelques brèves rencontres, deux fois par semaine, l'homme accepte un poste de médecin en Afrique du Sud. Le couple se disjoind dans le buffet de gare, sans autre adieu qu'une main sur l'épaule.

Ce sujet a passionné et scandalisé l'Angleterre. En Europe, et particulièrement en France, l'adultère est, depuis Tristan et Isolde, un des principaux ressorts dramatiques, dans la tragédie

« BREVE RENCONTRE »
un film de David LEAN
et Noël COWARD
avec Celia JOHNSTON
et Fred HOWARD

sujet sans comprendre la qualité de son style. Et lorsqu'on cite les meilleurs films de 1945 dans les publications officielles ou officieuses, on s'oublie pas *César et Cléopâtre*, cet obscur sujet en couleurs, mais on fait pudiquement *Breve Rencontre*.

Pourtant, s'il y a un cinéma anglais, et qui compte, c'est *Breve Rencontre* qui le prouve. Son sujet est, chez nous, banal : le mari, la femme et l'amant, l'éternel triangle ; et l'éternel quart trop confiant qui lève sa pipe en lisant des mots croisés et en oubliant sa femme.

Mais, après tout, l'adultère de Madame Bovary était aussi commun. Comme celui d'Anna Karénine. Il n'est pas question d'égaliser Noël Coward, habile fabricant de très bonnes pièces de théâtre, à des écrivains de génie comme Flaubert ou Tolstoï, mais du moins peut-on comparer les sujets et leur traitement.

Ce qui donne toute une part de son prix à l'aventure d'Emma Bovary c'est la peinture de Rouen et des fermes de la campagne proche, le médecin, le curé, le pharmacien. *Breve Rencontre* vaut aussi par ses *Monsieur Homais*. Nous voulons dire par là non point des esprits forts de chef-lieu de canton, mais des silhouettes où l'on crée un type en quelques traits. Tels dans *Breve Rencontre* la caissière du buffet, avec sa perruque et ses sourires, l'employé du chemin de fer qui la confond, et même cette violoncelle grotesque, en dépit de la facilité caricalesque de sa caricature. Ou bien encore — il ne s'agit plus de personnages mais de faits — cette parodie des bandes-annonces pour superproductions cinématographiques, cette peinture d'un restaurant de demi-luxe dans une petite ville anglaise.

Pas un trait qui ne soit juste. Et, par comparaison, tout sonne faux dans *Misses Miniver*, fait en Amérique, malgré tout le talent de William Wyler. L'Angleterre à la mode d'Hollywood, celle de *Cavalcade*, de *Il était une fois*, de *Goodbye Mister Chips*, en dépit des qualités évidentes de ces films, choque autant les Anglais que *Vivre libre* scandalise les Français. Même pour nous l'Angleterre du *Misses Miniver* a la couleur des tableaux officiels, la convention des histoires édifiantes à l'usage de la jeunesse des écoles. Par contre, *Breve Rencontre* c'est l'Angleterre véritable, quotidienne, authentique, sans que pourtant la petite capitale de comté ou la gare de jonction ne soient autrement indiquées que par des touches discrètes, à peine appuyées.

Ce style est celui du bon cinéma anglais contemporain, qui s'oppose aux gigantesques épopées montées prétendument internationales, mises à la mode par Alexandre Korda et dont le calameux *César et Cléopâtre* est le prototype. L'école documentaire anglaise — celle de Grierson, de Basil Wright, de Cavalcanti, de Paul Rotha — a appris aux réalisateurs — surtout-ils des hommes de théâtre comme Noël Coward — l'importance du type humain socialement situé, du détail exact, du décor vrai, des visages de tous les jours. Nous avons déjà constaté ce souci dans *Le Chemin des étoiles* (the Way of the Stars) d'Anthony Asquith, *Western Approaches*, de Pat Jackson, ou *San Demetrio London*, de Charles Frend. Et George Charrois a fort bien dégagé dans *Les Nouvelles Mémoires* l'esthétique du cinéma anglais.

« Ses lois sont essentiellement celles de la soumission au réel : les détails sont si bien choisis, si évocateurs que toute transposition conventionnelle (du type de *Miss Miniver*) nous semble par comparaison insupportable. »

La soumission au réel est bien la règle d'or des grands films anglais. Et ce qui fait leur prix, c'est par là qu'une œuvre comme *Breve Rencontre* se trouve rejoindre Rome ville ouverte ou l'uita, de Roberto Rossellini. Les

méthodes de travail sont pourtant opposées.

Rossellini opère comme un reporter photographique saisissant la vie au vol, demandant seulement à ses personnages de revivre un épisode authentique dont ils ont été témoins — ou auraient pu être — les acteurs.

Coward et David Lean, au contraire, travaillent presque exclusivement en studio, dans des décors spécialement construits, avec des acteurs qui connaissent admirablement leur métier. Ce dont on sera convaincu en voyant le visage de Celia Johnston qui n'est ni jeune ni conventionnellement beau, mais dont l'expression est à chaque instant admirable de vérité, comme de « méfiance ».

Si Rossellini et Coward, ces deux antipodes, se rejoignent, c'est qu'en employant d'autres méthodes ils obéissent à une même esthétique, le réalisme. « Cette soumission au réel » dont parle Georges Charrois, peut s'exercer aussi bien dans *Breve Rencontre* que dans Rome ville ouverte, dans *Soupe au camp* comme dans *Mr. Keen* plombier, dans *La Grande Illusion* comme dans *Peter Ibbotson*, dans *Les Portes de la nuit* comme dans *La Botte du roi*, dans *Le Tourment d'Isidore* comme dans *Le Lys brisé*, dans *Le Déjeuner de bébé* comme dans *Le Voyage dans la lune*, etc.

Samuel Goldwyn, le grand producteur américain, déclarait hier que Hollywood devrait s'inspirer de la qualité des films anglais, français, italiens. Donnons à l'Amérique le secret de ces succès : ces cinémas ne se sont élevés ni de la ruse, ni de la vertu. Que Hollywood en fasse à nouveau autant. Mais le peut-il ?



Celia JOHNSTON, Fred HOWARD et Cyril RAYMOND dans « Breve Rencontre ».

comme dans le vaudeville. Il n'en est pas de même dans les pays anglo-saxons, où l'heureux mariage dénoue traditionnellement les intrigues. Pour le public britannique, une femme évidemment honnête et bonne, comme l'héroïne de *Breve Rencontre*, et qui songe à un homme autre que son mari, constitue, sur un écran ou sur une scène, une sorte de provocation scandaleuse. Cette circonstance a nul au film en Grande-Bretagne. On y a discuté de son

Dans les ciné-clubs

Chaque dimanche et chaque jeudi, à 14 h. 30, Ciné-club « Océanien » pour enfants au Palais de Chaillot (salle Musée de l'Homme).

Tous les mercredis à 21 heures au « Moulin de la Galette », 1, avenue Jaurès, Ciné-club « Moulin à Images » : le ciné-club au « Village ».

JEUDI 5 DECEMBRE :

Ciné-club « Cino », salle des « Agriculteurs », 8, rue d'Albion, 15 h. : *Jeunes filles en uniforme*.

DIMANCHE 8 DECEMBRE :

Ciné-club de la jeunesse du 20^e : *Derrière les murs*.

LUNDI 9 DECEMBRE :

Ciné-club de Paris : salle S.N.C.F., 21, rue de l'Entreprise, 20 h. 30 : 6 fois à l'heure.

MARDI 10 DECEMBRE :

Ciné-club du 8^e : *Jeunes filles en uniforme*.

Ciné-club « Universitaire », 21, rue de l'Entreprise, 20 h. 30 : *Les Révoltes d'Alger*.

Cercle technique de l'Écran : salle « Le Village », 11, rue Legendre, 20 h. 45 : *Film festival*.

Ciné-club « Voyages et aventures » : salle « Récamier », rue Récamier : *Films de Louis Quary et Le Tourment d'Isidore*.

Ciné-club « 48 » : salle du Delta, boulevard Rochechouart : *Films de Jean-Marie, Anzani du Japon*.

LETTRES FRANÇAISES N°270 28 JUILLET 1949

DE QUELQUES FILMS BRITANNIQUES

Les Chaussons rouges, film de Powell et Pressburger ; Il pleut toujours le dimanche de Robert Hamer ; Première décollation, de Carol Reed.

QUAND PEA vide les cinémas parisiens, les Américains commencent à insérer par ailleurs sur nos écrans quelques films britanniques. Un des aspects du conflit l'ère-d'or est la bataille que se livrent Hollywood et Arthur Rank. Pour ces deux adversaires le cinéma est bien une affaire de gouvernement. Aux traités de commerce répondent les votes du Parlement, et les décrets républicains de Washington aux honorables membres de la Chambre des lords. L'échec est important car la « zone libre » représente pour Hollywood plus de 20 % de ses recettes.

Malgré un « quota » minimum de 40 %, la scène économique du cinéma anglais est profonde. En février dernier, selon l'hebdomadaire corporatif

Le Cinématographe français, dix-neuf studios étaient fermés sur les vingt-six existant en Grande-Bretagne. Dans les sept qui restaient, un seul, celui de Rank, était en cours de tournage. Sous le double effet de la concurrence américaine et d'une crise économique croissante,

par
Georges SADOUL

qualité, la situation du cinéma britannique est assez précaire à Londres qu'à Paris.

Cette situation malicieuse a eu son influence sur la qualité des films britanniques. Ce développement a été d'autant plus sensible au récent Festival de Cannes qu'un landais de la guerre, la production de cinq ou six années écoulées, nous parvenait en bleu, avait peut-être échappé à nos yeux l'impopularité de l'école britannique.

Son existence, et son importance, ne sont pourtant plus contestables. Trois courants divergents ont depuis dix ans porté leurs fruits : la recherche des « documentaristes » prenant au sérieux la simplicité et aux valeurs nationales ; le style d'Alexandre Korda, prévoyant une mondialisation toute hollywoodienne ; l'effort humble et patient de réalisateurs comme Mitchell et Asquith. Et nous pouvons voir cette semaine à Paris trois films anglais de valeur, qui attestent la vitalité de cette école nationale :

Les Chaussons rouges. Il pleut toujours le dimanche et Première décollation. Nous en avons déjà rendu compte, mais nous retourneront pour pouvoir y revenir aujourd'hui.

Powell et Pressburger, réalisateurs des *Chaussons rouges*, avaient déjà prouvé l'attention qu'ils apportaient aux problèmes de la couleur.

Dans leur *Colonel Blimp*, comme dans une question de vie et de mort, ils ont unifié un raffinement nous déconcerte, et à une tendance à la caricature dans un « humour » mauvais

goût. L'indéniable schématisation de leur monde, les bristols-arrivés du très ingénieux ballet des *Chaussons rouges* ne font pas oublier qu'ils ont été du très ingénieux des possibilités d'industrialisation, et de manière que les Américains, après dans leur cinéma, ne nous aient jamais fait soupçonner.

Powell et Pressburger sont des hommes habiles et raffinés plutôt que des artistes ; ce n'est pas à croire que le premier — qui dirige *Le Voleur de Bagdad* — ait décliné dans l'indifférence « documentariste » la plus orthodoxe. Il y a quinze ans, d'ailleurs, à travers un certain enthousiasme, vers des sujets humains et sentimentaux. Il est d'ailleurs venu à l'art de l'émotion et de la « commercialisation » d'Hollywood. On comprend que *Les Chaussons rouges* soient en un gros succès aux États-Unis.

Robert Hamer, plus fraîchement issu de l'école documentaire, présente une tout autre tendance du cinéma anglais, celle qui a pour centre les études d'histoire. Il pleut toujours le dimanche vient par la tendance même que son réalisateur l'étranger au peuple des faubourgs londoniens. Cet aspect montre à la fois de la note juste et de la précision. Il nous donne aujourd'hui bien plus qu'il n'avait promis à nos débuts (l'épisode du miroir magique dans le cœur de la nuit).

Mais la parodie est frappante relative aux faubourgs de glorie et ceux que Marcel Carné défile chez nous avant guerre : une même à une métaphysique les mêmes, et la fatalité des dominés. Il ne peut que seules choses valables les auditeurs recherchent attentivement qui interprètent successivement les deux réalisateurs français et anglais : nous en avons trois unités, créant systématiquement d'un « atmosphère », créant d'un tragique quotidien, ou même d'un tragisme moderne et poétique.

Mais ces parties pris rattachées de vent-ils toujours conditionner un pessimisme conventionnel et rabâché, la nuit des décadents et de spiritualisme. L'avant-garde de Robert Hamer refuse de vingt ans, et même ses qualités. On le verra plus anglais que français ou allemand. Qu'il récrive ses scénarios aux aspects sociaux de son sujet, et il sera sans doute plus intéressant. Mais le pourra-t-il dans un monde régi par le « Roi Arthur Rank » dont l'indifférence et la bureaucratie s'accroissent à mesure les tâches redoublent, et à mesure le non-conformisme.

Première décollation est le meilleur de nos trois films anglais. Il aurait mérité une plus longue étude, pour son ton exceptionnellement vrai et tendu. Cette leçon et celle vérité sont données par des moyens d'écriture et de montage, le réalisateur nous fait passer par la main. Cette réaction, simple et puissante, dénote une personnalité vraiment forte. Mais Première décollation ne dépasse guère les limites du parti pris esthétique de style. Et nous avons un exemple d'ambition rétrospective que pour le moment, au temps de l'histoire. L'ambition est une très humaine tentation poétique : il habite que soit la peinture d'une ambassade pendant le week-end, de grand écarte ne se résout pas à combler le vœux de ce film. Après cette réflexion sur la méthode de l'histoire que fut *Old Man Oat* (l'histoire de l'histoire) vient la peinture sur la captivité et la multitude de l'histoire, la leçon de monde anglo-saxon qu'elle offre.

L'histoire et la réaction sont peut-être les traits caractéristiques de ces trois films, et de toute une part du cinéma anglais. Nous préférons les à celle de Carol Reed — d'un fort bel air d'une pleine connaissance de son talent — quand il finit, au lieu de la multitude individuelle, certains groupes sociaux : les employés dans *Strut*, ou les mineurs dans *Strut* dans le regard des diables.

Première décollation achève en tout cas de classer ces réalisateurs. David Lean nous avait déjà par ses vitesses d'être romanesque. Mais David Capponell et Les Grands Espions ont prouvé par leur application habile et minutieuse de peinture narrative, l'histoire, l'histoire Anglaise.

d'art l'histoire sans peine narrative hollywoodienne : ses premières techniques dans *Le Enchaînement*, *Le Miroir* de Dr. Edwards ou de *Hope* n'ont pas la délicate variété de leurs interprétations poétiques. Asquith, malgré l'oppression ou la Chanson de l'Enfer, reste très, très : son *Waters* nous a fait à l'air d'un monde dépeint ces limites. Et Laurence Olivier, dans ses films, est surtout un très grand homme de théâtre.

Acceptons dans Carol Reed comme le meilleur idéalisme de l'école britannique. Il avait pour l'Angleterre ce que furent Marais et Fils Long pour l'Allemagne. Pryor, Remor et Carol pour la France, Henschel et Pressburger pour l'U.R.S.S. au temps de la mort.

Ces comparaisons écrites en peu l'école anglaise. Dans le monde international, la part anglaise est un non libéralisme et personnel. Mais elle se conforme trop aux traditions et aux règles pour pouvoir subvertir. Ici, or un instant, ses rêves, sous le couvert d'une révélation.

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Production Korda-Selznick

CAROL REED apparaît majestueusement sur son trône à trois pieds, une femme à 5'10", une grande dame du cinéma britannique. Le grand REED, cock dans l'exil doré et conforté dans la Hollywood, et qu'il s'est résigné à y filer avec un inconspicue bric à brac d'adès, les plus absurdes ou les plus scandaleuses histoires policières. Anthony Aquila, son contemporain fort britannique, fait succéder à son rôle de héros, un rôle qui se résume à reconnaître Othello dans les Laurence Olivier appartenant moins au cinéma qu'au théâtre. David Lean, enfin, celui qui a pu dans l'académisme, cet passé du réalisme

par
Georges SADOUL

famille de Brès Rencontre à son
Les Amis passionnés, signes de Hen-
ry Bordeaux.

Nous avions mis en espoir certain dans la colonne britannique, tel qu'il s'était révélé à nous dans l'immediat après-guerre. Nous avions donc regretté de le voir si faiblement représenté à Rhodes. Marianne-Léonine Venise et, dans les débats, de Crottes. Nous nous sommes d'autant plus réjoui d'apprendre que le grand prix avait été au Professeur Roumès (que nous n'avions pas encore vu) que nous aurions eu la personnalité de son auteur en détail digne.

Carol Reed, ancien acteur passé à la mise en scène, attirait l'attention sur lui, après un certain nombre de films commerciaux, par deux réalisations d'ambiance populaire : *Samuel Beckett* et *Week-end* qui furent des succès. Ce dernier film, le seul qui soit connu en France, ne manque pas de promesses, agréés dans un ensemble assez conventionnel et malicieux. Nous ignorons presque tous les films dirigés pendant la guerre par Carol Reed, nous savons seulement qu'ils apparteniront aux genres les plus divers.

En 1945, le grand film de montage, *Les Vrais Glorieux*, qu'il dirigea conjointement avec l'Américain Carson Kamin, fut un parfait et brillant exercice de style documentaire. Puis, le réalisateur obtint un grand succès international avec *Heidi* lorsque de

marée (Odd man Out), le plus grand succès de la remarquable collection britannique éditée par Brunner, en 1948. On est pourtant tenté de voir son réalisateur prendre parti, dans son histoire, comme entre tant de styles et de réminiscences, plutôt que d'écrouler le spectateur par le labyrinthe de deux partitions dures et mal assorties. Mais Première Dédouille se grave dans la mémoire comme certaines nouvelles, tristes et cruelles, de notre Manquant.

L'auteur du *Premier Dilectionnel*, Graham Greene, est en substance du Trépidant Hermès. Ce romancier catholique, suivant les leçons de Chesterton, a essayé, pour saisir des échos et des métaphores et un poétique, les séductions du roman d'attente classique. Son œuvre la plus célèbre, *Le Passeur et le Glorieux*, a été adaptée par John Ford dans *Des*, son tout récent dans beaucoup de détails, mais non dans sa signification profonde. Le film américain tient à l'original, jusqu'à l'arrivée de Graham Greene. L'histoire politique prend peu ou contre intentionnellement ses intentions dans *Brighton Rock* : et le film britannique qui en fut fait correspondait très à sa page 606 après tout trop trait par son titre français, *Le Gang des Tumeurs*.

La Troisième Femme se déroule à Venice, en 1943 ou 1948. Un jeune Américain (Joseph Cotton) fraîchement arrivé dans une ville qui lui est inconnue veut venger son meilleur ami assassiné. Il se fait aider par le maître de cabaret, une jeune Toulousaine (Aldra Valli) et le chef de la police anglaise (Michael Redgrave). L'enquête lui apprend que son ami (Orson Welles) vit toujours. Mais, découvrent qu'il est un abominable criminel, il le livre donc à la justice, qui l'abat à coups de revolver.

Dans quelques tous les romans définitifs anglais entre les deux guerres le bien était incarné par Lord Edward ou Flawless Service ; le mal par d'extraordinaires « collés » comme : Graham Green, et Carol Reed ont à peine modernisé ces vieux genres. Leurs héros anglo-américains combattent le commandement soviétique pour arracher de ses griffes une proie inatteignable et tou-

chiste, une Tchéquie qui ne veut pas retourner à Prague. C'est en somme russe qui le banit, protégé par l'écou, qu'il est, organe du trafic de psychisme à l'étranger dont sont victimes enfants et femmes épuisées. Ce tableau « tragique » de Vienne reprend, dans l'humanité, la propagande de la comédie légère américaine *La Seconde femme de Boris*.

La technique du scénario s'est peu à peu transformée, ce qui ne prouve rien. Question de culture dans, les écrivains, depuis *Les Affranchis*, de simulations de scénarios, depuis *Paroles*, de chats éditoriaux, depuis Edgar Poe, de ténacité inlassable ou moment où ne savaient parler, depuis *Requiem*, ou d'homme tragique déboulonné dans une paisible réunion publique, depuis *Les 25 marches* ?

Ces variations sur de très vieux thèmes donnent parfois du bon cinéma, nous assure-t-on.

On a vu et sans peine que le dirigeant du représentant du *Arbeits Council* au quatuor de conférenciers est fort bien venu : mais la poursuite dans les égouts est gratuite, trop longue, sans confort, au mauvais, fort odieux, ramasse épileptiquement à plusieurs reprises les participants dans un décor unique, mais coûteux, et que Sakinich-Karida, les producteurs, préfèrent à amortir ».

Prix gratuits encore est un Océ-
gus, dans la Grande Rue du Pré-
lar, arbitrairement transportée pour
ce gros effet au centre de Vienne.
Cette capitale, pour qui la connaît

Cette capitaine, pour que la comète
un peu, d'est, ici, ni comète, ni
d'écart. Elle reste un grand écart.
baroque et ruine, destin à rejoindre
par son pithèque dans une action
drôle.

La sa se réjouit de film qui évite l'atmosphère d'un public exporté dans une étrange habitude des traditions politiques et dit par Oscar Wilde, qui joue le naïf : "Frente aux de terreux, nous les Bergues nous ont tant Michel-Ange, Raphael, Vinci". Il est comte au de pain, de sucre et du démocrate, en Suisse, s'agit-il d'être qu'une nouvelle sorte d'équilibre ? Le conseil... On paraît penser que les scènes stériles d'un film qui ne fait jamais voir les habitants d'un pays, est négative à la même époque les mêmes années ? Nous sommes les premiers, avec deux personnages, et les deux sont vides de leur fonction.

Il avait l'habitude de répliquer que la fortune et possible époque victorienne donna Dickens, alors que l'Anglais d'après 1849 en est réduite à Graham Greene. Et que son salaire est l'équivalent exact d'un vieux contour mécanique à peine remis au point du jour.

Après *Master of Life and Death*, une erreur de perspective a pu faire passer quelques "importance" à Powell et Fradette. Le *Marquis* noir ou *Les Chénouans rouges* sont en fait de plus décevant. Nous avons peut-être surévalu Carol Reed pour ses deux réussites massives d'après-guerre. Le meilleur représentant de l'école britannique, indéniable à l'écran Hitchcock, pourrait bien se situer au niveau de Deleville, en délaissant parages où Chénou est tenté d'être un *Manon*.

1982 ans. *The 39th* ne méritait pas le Grand Prix de Cannes. Sur le plan de l'art tout se mesure, car je ne crois pas que le jury ait cédé à l'insinuation, plutôt qu'à la tentation de l'outrage, après un festival « occidental », le film le plus « africain » de la compétition. Une technique impeccable dans la mécanique du montage et du son, mais pas aussi à l'aise dans la mise en œuvre d'un certain réalisme anglo-saxon-méso-américain-afro-asiatique. A une connaissance, comme film éducatif, certainement (1982-83 *The Soft Up*) ne pouvant se grandir qu'à Cannes. Le courage, et le bon sens, comme manifestant de ne pas décevoir le jury.

Les Lettres françaises [12/12/49]

PASSEPORT POUR PIMLICO : Un chef-d'œuvre d'humour anglais. (Anglais v. o.)



PASSPORT TO PIMLICO
Scén. : T. E. B. Clarke.
Réal. : Henry Cornelius.
Interp. : Stanley Holloway,
Margaret, Rutherford, Her-
mione Baddeley, Paul Du-
puis, Raymond Huntley,
John Slater, Jane Hylton,
Betty Warren, Barbara
Murray, Basil Ratford,
Naunton Wayne. Images :
Lionel Banes. Son : Ste-
phen Dalby. Musique :
Georges Auric. Prod. :
Rank.

PPLUS encore que l'originalité du scénario, ce qui m'émerveille, c'est que les auteurs du film aient su exploiter jusqu'au bout, sans faiblir, l'idée sensationnelle qui en constitue le départ. Car de bonnes idées on en trouve parfois, mais le plus dur, c'est de les faire tenir pendant une heure et demie. Combien de films font des démarrages prometteurs, qui retombent ensuite lamentablement, avec un chuintement de fusée mouillée. A la fin du premier quart d'heure, on se dit ici que c'est trop beau pour durer. Au bout d'une demi-heure, on s'étonne de ne s'être pas encore ennuyé, à la fin on est ravi.

L'idée la voici : l'explosion d'une bombe non désarmée, relique déjà familière du blizz londonien, met à jour dans un petit quartier de Londres nommé Pimlico, un trésor et un parchemin du XV^e siècle. Le parchemin déchiffré

révèle que le duc de Bourgogne n'était point mort comme de vains historiens le pensaient, dans je ne sais plus trop quelle bataille, mais que son château s'élevait sur ces lieux et jouissait par privilège royal du XV^e siècle, d'exterritorialité. Ce décret n'ayant jamais été aboli, les « Pimligasques » se réveillent donc bourguignons. Quelles perturbations dans la vie de Pimlico et plus encore de Londres et de l'Angleterre va provoquer la présence de cette enclave étrangère au cœur de la vieille cité. C'est le sujet du film. Qu'on essaie seulement d'imaginer maintenant qu'il faut constituer une douane et vérifier les passeports dans le métro. Un gouvernement affolé essaie de réduire Pimlico à l'annexion par le blocus économique, mais l'opinion publique criant aux minorités opprimées, l'affaire trait sans doute jusqu'à l'O.N.U. sans un arrangement final qui trouve encore le moyen de n'être pas décevant.

Je crois que seul le cinéma anglais était capable de mener à bien un tel sujet. Paradoxalement, c'est son genre du réalisme social, du détail vrai qui, considéré ici avec un sens traditionnel et swiftien de l'humour et de la satire, nous permet de marcher à fond dans cette délicieuse fable sociale.

Il est difficile de choisir des noms dans une interprétation nombreuse et excellente dont aucune individualité, en raison même du style, n'est particulièrement mise en valeur. Citons pourtant Stanley Holloway, ainsi que la délicieuse et grotesque Margaret Rutherford, dont la trop brève composition de professeur d'histoire médiévale égale celle du Médium de *L'Esprit s'amuse*.

André BAZIN.

Radio Cinema n° 77
22-06-51.

Les contes d'Hoffmann

(Anglais.) - Réal. : M. Powel et E. Pressburger.

L'Opéra libéré.



DANS quel guépier me suis-je jeté ? Moi qui n'entend rien à la musique et à l'anglais, me voici contraint de rendre compte d'un opéra dont je n'ai même pas compris un mot. Car il ne peut-être évidemment question de doubler un tel film et son sous-titrage nuirait trop gravement à l'harmonie de l'image en couleur. N'attendez donc point une critique musicale et chorégraphique pour laquelle je me sens par trop incompetent. Je suppose seulement que les amateurs d'Offenbach y prendront un plaisir extrême, mais à ceux qui ne se dérangeraient pas pour une soirée à l'Opéra je conseille vivement d'aller plutôt passer la nuit avec les frères Marx dont le célèbre classique vient justement de ressortir. Le lecteur me pardonnera de me limiter au seul problème posé par le film, indépendamment de l'œuvre musicale choisie.

En 1894, au moment du lancement de son *Kinétoscope*, Edison déclarait : « Je suis persuadé que, dans les années qui viennent... des opéras pourront être donnés au « Metropolitan Opera » de New-York, sans qu'aucune modification ait été apportée à l'original et ce, avec des artistes et des musiciens morts depuis longtemps. En 1951, au cours d'une soirée de gala, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* ont, en effet, été projetés à l'Opéra de Paris, mais c'était avec des artistes vivants et de nombreuses modifications par rapport au spectacle tel qu'il eût été donné sur notre scène nationale.

Ce n'est pourtant pas un hasard si l'une des toutes premières prophéties cinématographiques se rapporte à l'opéra. Au-delà de la naïveté du propos, trop facile à déceler après coup, Edison entrevoyait pourtant les réserves spectaculaires du cinéma et ce qu'il pouvait apporter à l'opéra. Mais ce n'est pas en tant que moyen de reproduction : l'originalité du film d'Emeric Powell et Pressburger est de renouveler de fond en comble les dernières techniques du spectacle lyrique.

D'abord en multipliant considérablement les ressources du merveilleux scénique beaucoup plus important à l'opéra qu'au théâtre. En créant un univers entièrement truqué pour les besoins de la cause, une sorte de scène sans coulisses où tout est possible. Les trappes de l'Opéra ne sont plus que jeux d'enfant. Ensuite par la couleur : la liberté avec laquelle la metteur en scène peut en jouer dans ce genre de film lui confère un rôle fantastique beaucoup plus important qu'à la scène. Mais ce n'est là encore qu'un aspect secondaire et superficiel du problème.



Léonide Massine dans le rôle de Spalanzani.

Le cinéma a permis de traiter entièrement en ballet l'œuvre d'Offenbach parce que les danseuses Moïra Shearer et Tcherina, qui à la scène ne pourraient être en même temps des chanteuses — le seraient-elles qu'elles ne sauraient chanter en dansant — ont été doublées par Dorothy Nond et Margarita Grandi. Le cinéma crée donc ici un monstre artistique nouveau : les meilleures jambes douées de la meilleure voix. L'opéra n'est pas seulement libéré de ses entraves matérielles, il l'est encore de ses limites humaines.

Enfin la danse elle-même est renouvelée par les ressources de la prise de vue et du montage qui permet une sorte de chorégraphie au second degré où le rythme de la danse est servi par celui du cinéma.

C'est à partir de ces données nouvelles qui bouleversent comme on voit radicalement non seulement la technique matérielle de la mise en scène du théâtre lyrique, mais plus encore ses moyens humains d'interprétation, qu'il me faudrait maintenant faire la critique des *Contes d'Hoffmann* cinématographique. Je m'excuse encore d'en rester là. André BAZIN.

Chapter Two:

François Truffaut and the New Wave: the Vilification of British Cinema

François Truffaut: [...] Once you were in Hollywood, you never attempted to imitate the British type of film. What I'm trying to get at - and I'm not sure I'm right about this and it's hard to define just what it is - is that there's something about England that's anticinematic.

Alfred Hitchcock: I'm not sure I understand what you're getting at. What do you mean by that?

François Truffaut: Well, to put it quite bluntly, isn't there a certain incompatibility between the terms "cinema" and "Britain". This may sound farfetched, but I get the feeling that there are national characteristics - among them, the English countryside, the subdued way of life, the stolid routine - that are antidramatic in a sense. The weather itself is anticinematic. Even British humour - that very understatement on which so many of the good crime comedies are hinged - is somehow a deterrent to strong emotions. It's my feeling that these characteristics worked against your particular style of narration, which is essentially to colour the story with fast-moving action and striking incidents. Despite the tongue-in-cheek approach and however vivid, it must be convincing. Above all, it seems to me, these national characteristics are in conflict with plastic stylisation and even with the stylisation of the actors.

Considering the high intellectual level in England, and in the light of the universal stature of her great writers and poets, isn't it rather curious that in the

seventy years since cinema came into being, the only two British film-makers whose works have actually survived the test of time - and space, for that matter - are Charlie Chaplin and Alfred Hitchcock.¹

When François Truffaut made these comments in his influential discussion with Alfred Hitchcock recorded in the summer of 1962, British cinema had already become part of that tradition of filmmaking which the future directors of the New Wave had been bent on savaging during their spell as critics for *Cahiers du cinéma*. As we will see in this chapter, the vision of cinema which lurks behind Truffaut's remark, also surfaces in their more specific responses to British films throughout the 1950s.

We have seen in the previous chapter how, immediately after the Liberation, British cinema had been the subject of a rather positive critical reception. The period immediately after the war was marked as a time of reconstruction where film was believed to have a social and educational mission. Central to the prestige of British films was the issue of realism, which was the dominant paradigm along with the defence of national cultural productions against the external threat of Hollywood. Thus although a variety of British films had been released in France, there was a widespread consensus that films that portrayed contemporary British

¹ François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), originally published in French as *Le Cinéma selon Hitchcock* (Paris: Robert Lafont, 1966). Quotation from the 1985 revised edition, (London: Simon & Schuster), 140.

life or adapted prestigious indigenous classics of literature represented a synecdoche for British culture. Indeed, after the Liberation, British cinema had acquired an identity of its own, its national specificity defined more or less like that of the "Italian school", in terms of realism and authenticity and thus positively distinct from Hollywood mass culture.

By contrast, during the 1950s, critical opinion changed radically and this positive image was replaced by an extremely negative view. A major difference with the immediate post-war period which undoubtedly influenced the reception of British films was the shifting critical climate. This shift may be characterised as one in which the mode of critical reception based upon realism, authenticity and the representation of topical issues was gradually but increasingly transformed into a mode of reception based upon cinema as the expression of a purely individual consciousness, the rejection of the thematics of films for *mise en scene* as the supreme definition of the cinematic, and the elevation of Hollywood to the realm of great art.

This new interpretation of cinema was accompanied by systematic attacks on French cinema which effectively became the aesthetic programme of the French New Wave. The canonical position of the New Wave in world cinema can hardly be overstated and Truffaut's article "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" is one of the most cited in French film history. A prime exponent of a vital tradition of polemical film reviewing in France, as a young critic, Truffaut's dismissal of British cinema was as confrontational as his vitriolic attacks against French

cinema. This attitude was broadly shared by other important figures of the New Wave who began writing at the same period, notably Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette and Eric Rohmer. One effect of this was that the case against British cinema so sweepingly stated by Truffaut was highly influential. However, as I argued in the introduction, to date there has been no historical analysis of this hostility.

It is to this issue that we turn in this chapter. My primary goal is not simply to rehearse the critical history of the French New Wave, illustrating, as some have done, its importance to film theory and criticism and its emblematic position in the history of French cinema. Such rehearsals tacitly affirm the authority of past interpretations, rather than question the manner in which meanings are created and perpetuated. Taking a different route, I shall argue that Truffaut's centrality to the field gives us the opportunity to consider criticism as a special kind of textual appropriation. Rather than see the vilification of British cinema as an unproblematic understanding based on an "original" textual meaning, Truffaut's case will provide the occasion to show how French film culture, during crucial moments in its evolution, constructed the significance of British cinema. From this perspective, criticism does not reveal the inherent truth of the text; instead, as Barbara Klinger has argued, "textual readings reveal the dynamics and concerns of critical movements".²

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to investigate in some detail why British

² Barbara Klinger, above cited, 1994, 2.

cinema became the object of such scorn and vilification, to be gradually erased from the canon of critically respectable cinema and appropriated by a later generation of critics who saw themselves as following in the New Wave's critical tradition. My aim is to focus on the central position as well as contradictions of François Truffaut and to unravel what was at stake in his dismissal of British cinema during his spell as a critic and in the famous book of interviews with Alfred Hitchcock. A discussion of Truffaut's ambivalent relationship with British cinema invites reflection about several facets of the director's discourse on the cinema. In the historical context that informs this chapter, an understanding of what Truffaut viewed as constituting cinema will be enhanced by the acknowledgment of a simple but often overlooked fact, namely that Truffaut was a man of many contradictions.

Moreover, I want to show that the terms in which British films were routinely attacked by a significant number of prominent French critics from the mid 50s onwards were strikingly similar to those employed against French cinema. This suggests that quite a specific discourse was at work, one in which the underlying concepts of cinema and values which were articulated consciously or unconsciously in Truffaut's writings are revealing projections. Thus, the process of transference which is at play in "the very act of reading, interpreting the text, handling it, shaping it to our ends, making it accessible to our therapies"³ may be

³ Peter Brooks, *Reading the Plot, Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 234

considered here as performing a specific ideological function in relation to French cinema in the context of Truffaut and the New Wave's symbolic struggle for power in the field of cultural production.

The chapter begins by exploring the various stages in the history of French film culture in the late 1940 and 1950s, and then moves on to consider how the development of a learned cinephilia within an educated urban stratum impacted on perceptions of British film. This is followed by a critical analysis of the process of demonisation and exclusion that took place with the emergence of new criterion for analysing film and in particular the *politique des auteurs*. This section looks at the crucial role of polemics in the process of the formation of a new pantheon and explores how the construction of mainstream French and British cinemas as "bad" others can be read as symptomatic of a tradition of polemics and struggles over taste and social distinction which have long structured French cinephilia since the first institutionalised film culture movement initiated by Louis Delluc and Ricciotto Canudo in the 1920s. The negative construction of British and French cinema as bad others does not, however, sufficiently account for the active policy of vilification carried out so relentlessly by Truffaut and his cohorts towards British film.

Considering the importance of American cinema in the pantheon of *Cahiers du cinéma*, in the second part, I want to suggest that the resolutely hostile relationship which coalesced between this specific section of French critics and British cinema was paradoxically structured around the central figure of Alfred Hitchcock, a

director whom these critics, ironically, since he was on many levels a cultural outsider to Hollywood⁴, constructed as the American *auteur de films par excellence*. The adoption of Hitchcock as a *Cahiers du cinéma* fetish object thus drew British cinema into broader aesthetic and ideological struggles with French film culture, struggles that, as we will see in the next chapters, have indelibly marked subsequent interpretations of British cinema in France.

The next section focuses on François Truffaut and his legacy. His paradoxical advancement of the *politique des auteurs* through his championing of the work of Hollywood directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks and the B-movie have often been foregrounded. However, there is a sense that there is a mismatch between these readings and the more ambivalent and contradictory aspects of many of his writings, contradictions that in my opinion have been underplayed in the analysis of his work as a critic. Thus less known than Truffaut's provocation about British cinema is his appraisal of British films such as *Doctor in the House* (Ralph Thomas, 1954), *The Rake's Progress* (Lauder and Gilliat, 1945), *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961)⁵, *The Prisoner* (Peter Glenville, 1955) and Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1963).⁶

The chapter concludes with an assessment of the legacy of Truffaut's critical

⁴ See Thomas Elsaesser, "The Dandy in Hitchcock", in Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzales (eds.), *Alfred Hitchcock Centenary Essays* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 3-13.

⁵ François Truffaut: *Letters*, Trans. by Gilbert Adair, (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 216.

⁶ According to Karel Reisz, "Twenty years after it was made, a waiter in a restaurant brought a message to Jack's [Clayton] table from an unknown guest. The note was addressed to him and read: 'The *Innocents* is the best English film after Hitchcock goes to America'. It was signed François Truffaut", *The Guardian*, 25 March 1995, quoted in Neil Sinyard, *Jack Clayton* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 81.

agenda for film historiography and canon construction, examining the way in which British cinema entered a long tunnel of critical oblivion as his agenda informed much of the subsequent evaluation of British cinema and was repeated everywhere, occluding in the process both Truffaut's contradictions and other French critical approaches.

In order to understand the impact which the early criticism of François Truffaut and *Cahiers du cinéma* made, it is necessary to consider them in the socio-historical context of the film culture of the time. Before we study the outbreak of hostility towards British cinema more closely, the next section documents and explains the cultural context and material conditions which at the time produced and encouraged a deep and intense cinephilia sustained by the activities of the cine-club movement. The rise of cinephilia would prove an important context for anti-British feelings and it is to these developments that the next section will turn.

Film Culture and Cinephilia in the 1950s

The spreading of cinephilia as a cultural phenomenon coalesced as cinema was entering the sphere of legitimate culture. The expansion of a cultivated public, fuelled by the cine-club movement was unique to France. It had been strengthened throughout the 40s and 50s while at the same time cultural institutions and systems of financing marked the official recognition of cinema as a fully-fledged art form. The number of regulations governing state aid for film productions in the immediate post-war period were further developed with the system of *aide*

sélective established in 1953 offering investment based not on commercial success but on the quality of the project proposed and in 1959 the *avance sur recettes* scheme would grant interest-free loans to filmmakers with a promising project, the loans being repayable from the profits made. In 1958, tax concessions were accorded to the cine-clubs and the *cinémas d'art et essai*, an exhibition infrastructure which contributed to the development of a numerically powerful art house circuit which catered for a new cultivated audience and provided a framework for the promotion of films considered to have particular "artistic qualities". In 1959, André Malraux, who was both a famous novelist and a filmmaker, became minister of Cultural Affairs. At the same time, the French state moved control of the *Centre National de la Cinématographie* away from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and placed it under the aegis of Malraux's new Ministry of Culture. The CNC also strengthened Film Aid for riskier, low-budget films, while a further development under Malraux was the establishment of *Maisons de culture*, centres of art, sport and education whose film programming included critical introductions and discussions led by cultural *animateurs*.

Thus, as we have seen, during the previous decade, the social status of cinema was being transformed as a cultivated urban public, notably in the cine-clubs, encouraged cinema to be regarded as a legitimate cultural practice. Via the social status of their members, the cine-clubs had helped increase the artistic legitimacy of cinema and the number of people sensitive to the idea of cinema as art. To gain this position cinema required high cultural prestige. The idea of cinema which was

articulated in the cine-clubs was defined in terms of high culture where cinema was constructed as a repository of national European identity against the cultural influence of the United States. The sustained state support and extensive cinema coverage which testified to the importance of film in the national culture was paralleled by the emergence of critical discourses that increasingly functioned to define an idea of film as conveying a unique authorial vision. This meant that although cine-clubs had grown out of the popular education movement, they had effectively created selected film markets defined by a sense of distinction from the mainstream and an opposition between art and commerce; in the cine-clubs, maverick directors such as Orson Welles, Jean Renoir, Roberto Rossellini and Jean Vigo were established as fixtures of the film canon.

The work of the cine-club movement and specialised film journals, the rise of the *art et essai* circuit and the screenings of Henri Langlois's *Cinémathèque* attended by the cultivated urban strata had created a new social audience with the effect that cinephilia was being redefined as a passionate and learned approach to film. The spreading of cinephilia as a socio-cultural phenomenon coalesced as cinema was entering the sphere of legitimate culture, gradually produced a smaller, more elite audience. The cine-clubs encouraged an atmosphere of debate around cinema which also created a demand for sophisticated information and analysis, thus creating a new readership and a new way of receiving film.

The intense passion for cinema that resounded across a younger generation was quite different from the 1940s enthusiasm that had coalesced around realism. In

the 1940s, critical opinions had increasingly been split between a political approach to film that disliked Hollywood on ideological grounds; Georges Sadoul typified this approach, and a small but highly influential minority of intellectuals, "la nouvelle critique" which concerned itself with aesthetics whilst arguing that certain Hollywood artists represented a cinematic renewal, this latter approach represented by the figure of André Bazin. This trend intensified in the 1950s when the wave of youthful enthusiasm for film in general began to transform the canons of French critical taste. The terms of these debates have a long tradition in French film culture. In the 1920s, the early film theory and criticism of the first wave of film theory and criticism had already identified the director as the main source of artistic creativity, combining a fascination for American cinema with a definition of the specificity of French cinema as art.⁷ Similarly, around the late 40s, a new critical discourse had been slowly taking shape and forged through American cinema and in particular around the figure of Orson Welles, comedy, *film noir* and the western with the years 1949-1951 marking a turning point.

One of the most influential cine-clubs was *Objectif 48*, a prestigious and polemical Parisian ciné-club formed in 1948 by filmmakers and film critics generally opposing mainstream French cinema. Organised by André Bazin, the group included Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Alexandre Astruc, Jean Cocteau, Robert Bresson, and Roger Leenhardt amongst others. The meeting place of the literary

⁷ See Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 2 vols., 1907-1929, 1930-1939 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

and cinematic intelligentsia, in 1948, *Objectif 49* sponsored a highly successful "*Festival du film noir américain*" and a year later organised an alternative to the Cannes festival entitled the "*Le Festival indépendant du Film Maudit*" at Biarritz for those who in Jacques Doniol's phrase "dreamed of a cinema *d'auteurs*".⁸ A highly influential critical event, the festival has subsequently been seen as marking a turning point in the development of a new critical discourse around personal cinema and as heralding the birth of the future generation of "Young Turks" which would subsequently distinguish itself both from the "old guard" of French critics and from the "nouvelle critique" represented by Bazin.⁹

Among the cinephiles that attended was Truffaut (seventeen at the time), in the capacity of Bazin's assistant as well as Claude Chabrol, Jacques Rivette and the critic Jean Douchet. The festival aimed to promote American cinema and commercially unsuccessful or undervalued films, hence the epithet "*maudit*", but these served as models of highly individual aesthetic ventures which enhanced the concept of cinema as art. Amongst other films, the festival showcased Jean Vigo's *Zéro de conduite* and *L'Atalante* (1933, 1934), the latter in its first restored original version, as well as the European premiere of Renoir's *The Southerner* (1945), the works of two directors who were canonised by *Objectif*. The work of Alfred Hitchcock was also included with *The Paradine Case*, but Britain's only

⁸ Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, "L'histoire des *Cahiers*", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 100, October 59, 64.

⁹ See Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 114, Antoine de Baecque: *Cahiers du cinéma, histoire d'une revue*, Vol I (Paris: Editions Cahiers du cinéma, 1991), 41-44, Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, in Ciment and Zimmer (eds.), above cited, especially 74-6.

contribution that year was Mary Seton's documentary on Jesus College in Oxford, *Time in the Sun*, which used footage shot by Eisenstein in Mexico.¹⁰

The "*Festival du film maudit*" was meant as an anti-Cannes; the screenings and animated discussions had a great impact in the growing debate over films conveying a personal vision. According to several commentators, it might have been the first success of the movement towards the personal cinema of *auteurs* that would culminate in the mid-50s. Yet, in 1950, the second and last edition of Biarritz (attended by future directors of the New Wave) where Britain presented five films; *Brighton Rock* (John Boulting, 1947), *The Spider and the Fly* (Robert Hamer, 1949), *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1935), *Whisky Galore* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1949) and *Major Barbara* (Gabriel Pascal, 1941), was deemed a total failure. According to Dudley Andrew "the decision to concentrate on British cinema contributed to the sense of mediocrity which pervaded the festival"¹¹, whilst an additional account of this perceived failure has been provided by Richard Roud who has recalled that many complaints had been made that the programme "concentrated too heavily on new British films" which, "although good, did not fit into the category of *film maudit*".¹² André Bazin has theorised the approach the Biarritz event was trying to promote as a call for "the enlarging of the concept of the avant-garde to a fringe of so-called commercial cinema".

¹⁰ The full programme of the festival is included in Arnaud Gourmelin's article, "Le "Festival du film maudit" et le "Rendez-vous de Biarritz", Biarritz, 1949 et 1950", *1895*, 29, December 1999, 105-26.

¹¹ Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 158.

¹² Richard Roud, *A Passion for Film, Henri Langlois and the Cinémathèque Française* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 81-2.

Paradoxically, this had led Bazin to celebrate the innovative style and personal visions of

Wyler, Orson Welles, Preston Sturges for America [...] Renoir (the inexhaustible, the magnificent) [...] Bresson and Leenhardt in France, the Rossellini of *Paisà* and the Visconti of *La Terra Trema* in Italy.¹³

Significantly, no British director appeared in Bazin's pantheon.

Importantly, the assertion that Alfred Hitchcock was an *auteur de film*, which would generate intense controversy in the mid-50s, was already being debated: in *Raccords* (1950-1952), edited by Gilles Jacob in Paris and in *La Gazette du cinéma* (May to November 50), produced by the *Bulletin du Ciné-club du Quartier Latin* under the editorship of Eric Rohmer. *La Gazette du cinéma* attracted established writers such as Alexandre Astruc and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze as well as articles by newcomers such as Jean-Luc Godard and Jacques Rivette. It included highly favorable reflections on Hitchcock, presenting him as an innovator and countering negative assessment of the director in *L'Ecran français* and *Raccords*. The demise of *La Revue du cinéma* in late 1949 had coincided with the decline of *L'Ecran français* which had been absorbed by *Les Lettres françaises* in 1952. In 1951, the cinephiles from both *La Revue du cinéma* and *La Gazette du cinéma* would move to *Cahiers du cinéma*, created in 1951 under the editorship of André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Lo Duca, whilst the negative views of Hitchcock expressed in *Raccords* would be perpetuated in *Positif*, a journal

¹³ André Bazin, "Découverte du cinéma: défense de l'avant-garde", originally published in *L'Ecran français*, 21 December 1948, reproduced in André Bazin, *Le cinéma français de la Libération à la Nouvelle Vague* (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque des Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), 325-9.

originating from the cine-clubs of Lyon and founded in 1952 by Bernard Chardère.

As Ulf Hedetoft has noted, "critical reception obliquely reflects privileged elite images of self and other as well as period specific concerns."¹⁴ But a paradoxical aspect of the elite dimension of cinephilia resides in its taste for what is on the margins and distinct from the mainstream, detached from middlebrow taste which stands between the two extremes of high and low culture. In a polemic in *La Gazette du cinéma*, Jacques Rivette had accused the second edition of Biarritz of having "deliberately let cinema trail behind the worst literature", calling for a "mise en scène of action" and "scripts with straightforward acts where the succession and sequence of scenes constitute an action".¹⁵ Rivette's comments on the negative literary qualities of the films presented at Biarritz (some of which are now seen as classics of British cinema), already announced the future positions of the Young Turks in the 1950s. Rivette's urging of "a cinema of action and violence", which is reminiscent of Truffaut's particular view of cinema in his conversation with Hitchcock quoted above, would be a continuing concern of *Cahiers du cinéma* in relation to American cinema during the 1950s, a concern which as Jim Hillier has noted, was both "a reaction against European gentility and intellectualism" and the "expression of a certain male perspective".¹⁶

The word cinephilia describes the desire and love for cinema; a passion for

¹⁴ Ulf Hedetoft, "Between cultural globalisation and national interpretation", in Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (eds.), *Cinema and Nation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 294.

¹⁵ Jacques Rivette, "Bilan pour Biarritz", *La Gazette du cinéma*, 4, Octobre 50, 1.

¹⁶ Jim Hillier, *Cahiers du cinéma, The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press/British Film Institute, 1985), 74.

seeing which is steeped in fetishism. This special relationship to cinema is accompanied by cult practices, such as the mania for collecting, analysing and fetishising of specific moments in a film. From its origins, cinephilia was an exclusively masculine passion and in the 1950s, it was a wholly male preserve, marked at times with considerable misogyny. Noël Burch has analysed the psychic and intellectual characteristics of cinephilic behaviour as a typically masculine activity characterised by abstraction, an obsession with inventories and a typically masculine transfer of affect onto inanimate images, otherwise described by Michael Marie in his work on the French New Wave as "obsessive neuroticism".¹⁷ In the 1950s, French cinephiles were drawn to Hollywood cinema by a form of eroticism that may be described as regressive, viewing the female body as an object and a locus of male desire where glamorous stars functioned as fetishes and the cult of Hollywood stars such as Marilyn Monroe in the 1950s, illustrates what Antoine de Baecque has called "a regulated and codified eroticism, fiendish and fetishist".¹⁸

Antoine de Baecque has described cinephilia as a counter-culture defined by provocation, inventing a culture which countered the established pantheon with one of their own choosing.¹⁹ De Baecque sees Hollywood as the paradigmatic site

¹⁷ Noël Burch, "Cinéphilie et masculinité", (1), *Iris*, 26, Autumn 1998, 191-6. Michel Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*, translated by Richard Newpert (London: Blackwell, 2003), 105.

¹⁸ Antoine de Baecque, *La cinéphilie, Invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture 1944-1968* (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 283.

¹⁹ Antoine de Baeque, *La cinéphilie. Invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture* (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 25.

and locus of erotic projection before the arrival of European films such as Roger Vadim's *Et dieu créa la femme* (1956) and Ingmar Bergman's *Summer with Monika* (1952) which effected a transition from the deciphering of erotic moments produced by the Hays Code to a more explicit erotic vision of the body of modern women on the screen. However, although de Baecque has addressed the fetishist aspects of cinephilia, he is reluctant to confront or acknowledge the blatant misogyny reflected in cinephile writings. De Baecque reads the enthusiasm for the more "natural" bodies of Brigitte Bardot and Harriett Anderson in gender-blind ahistorical terms that are typical of French cinephilia; women are mere ciphers and the conduits through which the New Wave acceded to modernity. Thus in *Le Mépris* (1963), for instance, Bardot's character becomes a mere signifier of modernist Godardian formal experimentation; "an icon [...] just like Manet's Olympia had been at the beginning of modern painting, a new original Eve".²⁰

During his early spell as a critic, François Truffaut repeatedly and openly bragged about his erotomania and his film reviews were often elegiac celebrations of the anatomy of Hollywood stars. Truffaut's promotion of Hollywood in the 1950s can often be seen in great measure as the championing of erotic preferences that were rationalised into aesthetic dogma. One only needs to turn to the declarations of his earliest criticism to see evidence of misogyny and cultural antagonism. For instance in his review of *The Quatermass Experiment* (Val Guest, 1955), an early film by the British Gothic horror film studio which would become the object of a

²⁰ De Baecque, above cited, 263-293.

cult (see next chapter), Truffaut noted that in one scene, a terrified woman "runs off yelling but we don't feel for her since she isn't pretty".²¹ As a case in point, the obvious sexism displayed in his review of *Brief Encounter* is exemplary of how Truffaut's attitude to women is often translated into critical preferences and how, in his early days as a critic, the lure of eroticism often became the pretext for aesthetic arguments: "It took us a good hour and a half to admit that an ugly woman could be likable. *Brief Encounter* ended at the very moment when we were about to agree to the ugliness postulate".²² In his review of *Trouble in Store* (John Paddy Carstairs, 1954), Truffaut complained that:

When a pretty girl crosses the frame, they are quick to show us a close-up of Margaret Rutherford so that we are not led to believe that British cinema also has its pin-ups [...] Having left during the first half of the film, we hear the second half is as bad. So, better to abstain here.²³

Geneviève Sellier has been critical of the tendency, in most studies of the New Wave, to emphasise its aesthetic aspects and innovation on form at the expense of the economic, institutional and socio-cultural context from which it emerged. Sellier has linked the emergence of the New Wave to the social modernisation of France favouring the emergence of new social classes of urban intellectuals and sees French cinephilia as a continuation of the "ontological" misogynous tradition of early nineteenth century French literature where there is a conflict between

²¹ François Truffaut, "Le Monstre: Monsieur Cactus", *Arts*, April 1957, translated in Wheeler Winston Dixon, above cited, 79.

²² François Truffaut, "Notes sur d'autres films", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 29, December 1953, 59, translated in Wheeler Winston Dixon, above cited, 34.

²³ François Truffaut, writing under the pseudonym Robert Lachenay, "Le roi de la pagaille", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 35, 1954.

(male) artistic creation associated with elite culture and the feminine, associated with popular culture.²⁴

The future directors of the New Wave may be considered as constituting a generational peer group. Indeed, they were one of the new "tribes" that rapidly emerged with modernisation and developed new cultural tastes while distancing itself from the culture of its fathers.²⁵ In a spirit of reaction against the traditions and values of their own culture, a cultivated urban strata embraced jazz music, "hard-boiled" pulp fiction, detective novels and American B-movies, all examples of American low culture which were eventually raised to cult status. As Ginette Vincendeau has noted, "more generally, and possibly unconsciously, the celebration of American films was designed to minimize connections to French culture."²⁶

The fascination with Hollywood was typical of the general intellectual interest in all aspects of American culture from abstract painting and jazz to American thrillers. After 1945, American "hard-boiled" fiction overtook British detective stories, although ironically many were pastiches of US thrillers: for instance the novels of Cheney and Chase who were in fact British. This new style was promoted by the "*série noire*" founded in 1945 for Gallimard by ex-Surrealist Marcel Duhamel and this new *roman noir*, which appeared at the same time as the

²⁴ Geneviève Sellier, "Masculinity and Politics in New Wave Cinema", *Sites*, The Journal of 20th-century contemporary French Studies, 4, 2, Fall 2000, 474.

²⁵ Jean-Pierre Esquenazi, *Godard et la société française des années 1960* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004), 54-56.

²⁶ Ginette Vincendeau, "French Film noir in the Classical Era", in Andrew Spicer (ed.), *Film noir in Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming, 2006).

vogue for Existentialism, was taken seriously by intellectuals who saw it as part of the literature of revolt and the investigator as a kind of outsider. As Jeanyves Guérin has noted, this widespread love for the standards and values of the modern American lifestyle concurrently made British culture appear passé:

The Americans, they bring with them dollars, a sophisticated technology, jazz, thrillers, cartoons and a formidable cinema. One still learns English with Agatha Christie but the thriller comes from the United States. Sartre's indifference to England matters more than the Anglomania of an aging Maurois. While the politics of the White House are despised at *Les Temps Modernes*, the review, like *Esprit* at the same time, dedicates a special issue to the fascinating America. Faulkner, Wright and Algren are published but only one poem by Spender. England has faded into an Anglo-Saxon world dominated by the US. The debate between Anglophiles and Anglophobes has ceased for lack of participants; from now only those for or against America occupy the ground.²⁷

In contrast with the French intellectual fascination with America, the growing irrelevance of French novelist, biographer and historian André Maurois whose interest in British civilisation had sparked several works (Maurois's first historical study was his 1937 *Histoire d'Angleterre* and he was the author of several biographies of famous British figures such as Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Byron, Charles Dickens), thus speaks of the comparatively low interest in British culture and civilisation as a model to be followed. In addition, as Christine Geraghty has suggested in her reading of the structuring figure of the European woman in the Cold War British film, in the 1950s, Britain occupied an ambivalent position on the fringes of Europe.²⁸ Ann Jäckel has also observed that in contrast with Italy

²⁷ Jeanyves Guérin, "John Bull et Marianne", *Esprit*, 282, March-April 1985, 80.

²⁸ Christine Geraghty, *British cinema in the Fifties, Gender, Genre and the New Look* (London and

and France which entered into a period of major cinematic cooperation in the 1950s, although France and Britain would sign a co-production agreement in 1965, this barely produced an average of one film a year due to linguistic and cultural differences, as well as opposing film policies and practices.²⁹

In the late 1940s, a younger generation of cultural rebels such as the legendary figure of post-war Parisian intellectual life, Boris Vian, began to downgrade recognised Italian neo-realist "masterpieces" against the imagination and technical prowess of Hollywood studio productions.³⁰ More closely relevant to my project, in contrast with his love for America, Boris Vian had been highly disappointed by his journey across the Channel, "The salvation army, porridge, golf [...] all this belonged to the past, hence his pun on "*L'Albion à réaction*".³¹ In contrast to the louche attraction of US films, their high number of literary adaptations had imbued British cinema with a cultural cachet whilst the reputation of British films had been established amongst a respectable and cultivated audience that often looked down on the commercial vulgarity of Hollywood. French director Bertrand Tavernier who grew up as a cinephile in the 1950s has recalled how at the time British cinema was perceived as catering for an older generation:

British cinema has often stayed linked to memories of the most bourgeois

New York: Routledge, 2000), 93-111.

²⁹ Ann Jäckel, "European Co-Production Strategies: The Case of France and Britain", in Albert Moran (ed.), *Film Policy: International, National and Regional Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1992), 87.

³⁰ Boris Vian, "Vive le ténicolor ou en sous-titre On en a marre du *Voleur de Bicyclette*", *Saint-Cinéma-des-prés*, no 1, 1949, and "On en a marre de la vraie pierre ou en sous-titre Vive le carton-pâte", *Saint-Cinéma-des-Prés*, no 2, 1950.

³¹ Jeanyves Guérin, above cited, 81.

aspects of my adolescence; films that were projected on Sundays in the oratory college where I was doing my studies, when in detention, or when going to luxurious and respectable cinemas (the *Marbeuf*, the *Lord Byron*, and the *Madeleine*) with my family. This was in contrast to the westerns we would discover on the sly while bunking off at the *Napoléon*, the *Artistic Douai*, the *New York*, or at the *Far West*, *Cinéac Italien* or *California*. It was the respectable British cinema, more than the American, that found favour with my father's friends, intellectuals or writers to whom I would have never dared tell that I had loved *Wake of the Red Witch* [Edward Ludwig, 1948] or *Thieves's Highway* [Jules Dassin, 1949].³²

Cinephilia's appropriation of Hollywood stemmed from a tradition of film cultural concerns and interests well established since the 1920s with the first wave of cinephilia. The First World War period had seen a sustained intellectual interest in cinema, with Hollywood and in particular, De Mille's *The Cheat* acting as a specific catalyst for the cinephile counter-culture represented by the critic and director Louis Delluc. In the 1920, books and magazines devoted to the "art" of the cinema had begun to appear together alongside the establishment of non-commercial cinema circuits and the development of a cinematic avant-garde. Delluc had castigated French serials and literary adaptations and held up American cinema as a model in order to proselyte for a truly French cinema art where the filmmaker should be the *auteur* of the ideas and stories he films. The structural position of Hollywood in French cinephilia was thus never innocent; it was used as an instrument of provocation. As Noël Burch has argued, cinephilia was the invention of a certain French intelligentsia in the days of silent cinema, what he somewhat polemically describes as a form of "passionate slumming", a way of

³² Bertrand Tavernier, "Introduction", in Philippe Pilard, *Le nouveau cinéma britannique 1979-1988* (Renens: Cinq Continents Hatier, 1989), 5.

communicating with the "people" by adopting its taste. For Delluc, according to Burch, the beauty of American cinema resided in the absolute insignificance of the story and as the incarnation of spontaneity, naturalness and modernity, it was also above all an antidote to the bourgeois culture despised by Delluc as well as representing ammunition against European art, which the critic judged effeminate. Similarly in the 1950s, Hollywood, and the B-film in particular, were appropriated by a certain section of French cinephilia as the other of bourgeois taste and values, thus in stark opposition to the dominant critical trends of the 1950s which, in the spirit of the Resistance, privileged the serious messages of film, or "*film à thèse*". In this context, a European film received immediate praise whereas a Hollywood film was considered to be debased unless it expressed a socially progressive content, for instance John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940). It must be noted, however, that this hostility to cultural objects from America in the 1950s was not just the province of the French Communist Party. The position of French Catholic militants was identical, although their objection to Hollywood was based less on political aspects than on issues of morality.³³

Christophe Gauthier, in his study of cinephilia of the 1920s, has observed how

Cinephilia is a generational affair, cinephile taste is constructed from one generation to the other, more importantly from one generation against the other.³⁴

³³ Fabrice Montebello, *Le cinéma en France depuis les années trente* (Paris: Armand Collin, 2005), 78.

³⁴ Christophe Gauthier, *La Passion du cinéma. Cinéphiles, ciné-clubs et salles spécialisées à Paris de 1920 à 1929* (Paris: Ecole des Chartes, 1999), 290.

The quest for cultural distinction of the emerging generation of critics in the early 1950s thus meant operating a judgement of taste which went against "good taste". Caught in a kind of oedipal rebellion against their fathers, the *Cahiers* critics disowned certain manifestations of their own cinema and based their praise on American cinema and in particular the B movie, then considered as the most trivial, in fact the least "cultural". Within these politics of taste, the mainstream was positioned as the other of cinephile taste. Pierre Bourdieu's ideas about cultural capital have been helpful in understanding how taste performs a social function and how artists often recoup the very mass culture which they also attack:

Refusal of the middle-of-the-road taste of the big shopkeepers [...] refusal of bourgeois taste [...] refusal of the teacher's pedantic taste [...] And so the logic of double negation can lead the artist back, as if in defiance, to some of the preferences characteristic of popular taste.³⁵

For the purposes of this chapter, therefore, one can see that the mid-1950s in French film culture was marked by the ascendancy of a dominant critical discourse in which, as Thomas Elsaesser has argued, Hollywood was equated with "an imaginary America" which provided a repertoire for identification and served as a counterpoint to the "decline" of European culture".³⁶

It is important to note, however, that in the 1950s, although it was *Cahiers'* taste for American cinema which attracted the most attention and was its most

³⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 294.

³⁶ Thomas, Elsaesser, "Two Decades in Another Country: Hollywood and the cinéphiles", in Chris Bigsby (eds.), *Superculture, American Popular Culture and Europe* (London: Paul Elek, 1975), 199-225.

controversial, the journal contained a very diverse outpouring of reflections on the cinema and a range of materials and tastes were covered.³⁷ As Hillier has observed

Contrary to popular assumptions, *Cahiers* was not more interested in, or committed to, American cinema than other cinemas [...] a great deal of *Cahiers* was devoted to what in Anglo-Saxon film culture we would call 'art cinema', generally European [...] As *critics* involved in polemics, American cinema preoccupied them most; as *future filmmakers* they were very much drawn (and not only by necessity) to European cinema.³⁸

The controversial defence of Hollywood that had been started by Alexandre Astruc, André Bazin and Roger Leenhardt in the 1940s was nevertheless extended and systematised by the core group of young critics, Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rivette and Rohmer in *Cahiers du cinéma*. These tastes and ideas found material form in a large number of articles, public debates and interventions in the written press and on the radio throughout the 1950s. As a series of ostensibly minor events and debates began to resonate across film culture, soon, strategically placed articles in magazines with a larger audience helped to convert these minority positions into more widespread currency and we shall now explore the various ways in which these new ideas impacted on British cinema.

A Strategy of Demonisation and Exclusion: the *Cahiers* Canon and its Context

After WWII, British cinema had established a distinctive reputation with the

³⁷ See for instance the *Cahiers* Annual Best Film Listings 1955-9, in Hillier, above cited, 284-8.

³⁸ Jim Hillier, above cited, 175, emphasis in text.

work of David Lean, Carol Reed and Lawrence Olivier. David Lean's *Brief Encounter* and Carol Reed's *The Third Man* had both won a prize at the Cannes film festival, whilst Lawrence Olivier's *Hamlet* had won the Grand Prize at the Venice Film festival. This approach to filmmaking was comparable to the loose industry category known as the Tradition of Quality in French cinema; most films projected a glossy "quality" image tied to good taste and high culture: expertly crafted pictures with high production values and often derived from literary sources. Most were co-productions, in France often with Italy, fell into recognisable genres, employed classical story-telling techniques, were reliant on stars, and most were box office hits. The stories were often taken from literature and relied on classical narrative.

In Britain, government policy for the protection of the film industry was similar to that of France in its attempt to assist film production. The National Film Finance Corporation was established in 1949, whilst a second instance of state intervention was the Eady Levy instituted in 1950. The Levy created a fund from a tax on cinema admissions which was linked to box office takings and as a result, the most successful British films were the major beneficiaries. One of the major differences with France was that in 1956 the quality subsidy promoting artistic merit came into force, while in 1959 the *avance sur recettes* was introduced, establishing the basis of the *cinéma d'auteur*. As David Puttnam has noted,

Whereas the French scheme deliberately sought films of artistic merit, Eady was simply a mechanism to get the industry back on its feet and its backers

had no interest in aesthetic considerations.³⁹

Encouraged by the lower cost and the subsidy for British films instituted by the Eady Levy from 1950, American involvement in British film production rose throughout the 1950s,

By 1956, one-third of all British films had American backing [...] the predominant trend in the 1950s was to make big-budget pictures which would appeal to American as well as British audiences".⁴⁰

In the 1950s, Lawrence Olivier followed up his wartime success of *Henry V* (1945) by directing and starring in *Hamlet* (1948) and *Richard III* (1955). David Lean, whose reputation had been established with *In Which we Serve* (1942), *This Happy Breed* (1944), *Brief Encounter* (1945) and his adaptations of Charles Dickens novels *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Olivier Twist* (1948) both featuring Alec Guinness, in the mid-50s went on to make big-budget American-financed films and epics such as *Summer Madness* (1955) *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and *Doctor Zhivago* (1965) as did the other prominent director of the post-war years, Carol Reed with *The Third Man* (1949), scripted by Graham Greene, with whom he also made *Our Man in Havana* (1960). Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger broke up their production company, The Archers, in 1956 and Michael Balcon's Ealing studios, whose reputation for comedies with a predominantly realist style mixed with a typically British sense of

³⁹ David Puttnam with Neil Watson, *The Undeclared War, The Struggle for Control of the World's Film Industry* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 211.

⁴⁰ Robert Murphy, "Under the Shadow of Hollywood", in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays, 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), 62.

humour which satirized the British class system and English national character traits had been established in France with three releases in 1949, were forced to close in 1955 and were sold to the BBC.

As the number of people who went to the cinema decreased by half between 1954 and 1960, the British mogul J. Arthur Rank diversified and invested in photocopying machines, leisure activities and commercial television, producing safe, family entertainment (whilst Rank cinemas banned all X-certificate films, a policy which had a considerably inhibiting effect on the range of subjects filmmakers could tackle). According to Ian Mackillop and Neil Sinyard, what home audiences might have been responding to in British films of the 1950s was the representation of a "proud but restrained Englishness" which contrasted strongly with "American brashness".⁴¹ The aim of the Rank Organisation's global strategy in the 1950s, as Managing Director John Davis put it, was to "make films of high entertainment value, of good technical standards, in good taste and with sound moral standards".⁴²

Overall, in addition to the emergence of "runaway productions", in which the major American companies began investing in British filmmaking with big-budget pictures aimed at the international market and not just the British audience, the period saw the decline of historical and costume films; the development of British

⁴¹ Ian Mackillop and Neil Sinyard (eds.), *British cinema of the 1950s: a Celebration*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 3.

⁴² Vincent Porter, "Methodism versus the Market-place: The Rank Organisation and British Cinema", in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 88.

comedy, a cycle of "spiv" films, *film noir*, Cold War films, science-fiction, horror and the social "problem" film with comedy and the war film becoming two ascendant genres. The style most commonly identified with British cinema and praised by critics, according to Sarah Street, was

Realism, and indeed, many films, particularly in the 1950s, were dominated by the attributes of realism. These consisted of stylistic restraint, characters and situations that were 'believable', often equating with perceived notions of social reality; black and white cinematography; acting styles that privileged emotional restraint; and a general fidelity to the documentary tradition established in the 1920s and 1930s and identified with John Grierson.⁴³

Importantly, while Christine Geraghty has asserted that 1950s British cinema generally "demonstrated a blithe resistance to change, a comic affection for tradition and a sceptical attitude to modernist claims about social and technological transformation"⁴⁴, the cinephile idea of cinema that was flourishing in post-war Paris, "gave impetus to the modernist, distanced gaze on cinema that the most innovative films of the New Wave worked to mobilise".⁴⁵ Truffaut and the New Wave's critique of mainstream cinema as the *cinéma du papa* served to accentuate the gap between commercial and "cultural" productions and the social distinction between viewers. As Peter Wollen has noted only during periods of challenge is the canon made explicit,

⁴³ Sarah Street, "From Ealing Comedy to the British New Wave", in Elisabeth Ezra (ed.), *European Cinema*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 186-7.

⁴⁴ Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the 1950s, Gender, Genre and The New Look* (London: Routledge, 2000), 36.

⁴⁵ Geneviève Sellier, "Gender, Modernism and Mass Culture in the New Wave", in Alex Hughes and James S. Williams (eds.), *Gender and French cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 127.

The 'auteurist' revolution or paradigm shift was the last of a series of critical revolutions in the name of 'modernism' and against the *ancien régime* of artistic values [...] this would suggest that changes in the canon are often linked to changes in production. As the *Cahiers* critics saw it, the overthrow of the existing regime of taste was a precondition for the triumph of new filmmakers with new films, demanding to be judged on a different scale of values.⁴⁶

The hostility of the New Wave towards mainstream cinema arose within a film culture in which critical taste was already turning against British filmmaking in general. Towards the beginning of the 1950s, there were clear signs of disappointment, perhaps as a reaction against the over enthusiastic reaction of the early period of "discovery" discussed in the previous chapter, which was linked to the perceived "lack" of realism in French cinema and the politicised cultural journalism of the post-war period. In the collection of essays, *Cinéma 53 à travers le monde*, reviewing cinema from various nations, animation, short subjects and Chaplin's *Limelight*, the anglophile critic Jean Queval, in charge of the section on film in Britain, asserted that:

The most gracious compliment one can pay British cinema in 1953 is that it disappoints [...] perhaps our disappointment is due above all to the fact that we can't celebrate the last film of one of the most consecrated director [...] David Lean seems to be only interested in those exceptional subject matters that flatter the super-technician.⁴⁷

In his *Cahiers du cinéma* review of the forthcoming 1953 Cannes festival, André Bazin joined in the chorus of disapproval and observed that:

⁴⁶ Peter Wollen, "The Canon", in *Paris-Hollywood, Writings on Film* (London: Verso, 2003), 218.

⁴⁷ Jean Queval, "En Grande-Bretagne", in André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Gavin Lambert, Chris Marker, Jean Queval, Jean-Louis Tallenay, *Cinéma 53 à travers le monde* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1953), 101-13.

Certain hopes have not been totally upheld and, starting with *Brief Encounter*, that of a new British cinema, grounded in a subtle realism and with a cleverness, a refinement and a humour that had from the outset kept it from the pitfalls of populism. If British production has confirmed certain original qualities, it is hardly in the line of *Brief Encounter* but with humour and comedy of which the two archetypes are *Passport to Pimlico* and *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. Unfortunately, no film representing this tendency was showed at Cannes, where on the other hand, *The Third Man* obtained the Grand Prix in 1949. Whatever the value of Carol Reed's film, one can only see it as the culmination of a certain academicism in the tradition of quality.⁴⁸

The critical atmosphere and a shift in taste from current mainstream productions that caused some critics to suggest that British cinema was stagnating was also being directed at French cinema. In the early 1950s, the state-sanctioned popular entertainment cinema, the Tradition of Quality, which was enjoying most of the financial rewards from state aid, since the amount increased with receipts, progressively come under attack and was increasingly denounced as stifling artistic and aesthetic innovation in the French film industry. One important, permeating critical opinion, as Richard Neupert has noted in his study of French New Wave cinema, "was the broadly accepted notion that post-World War II French cinema was in a stagnant condition and needed a dramatic overhaul".⁴⁹ These arguments, according to Michel Marie were the institutional versions of the more polemical views of François Truffaut.⁵⁰ However, the condemnation of the Tradition of Quality had been inaugurated by Michel Dorsday in his review of

⁴⁸ André Bazin "A propos de Cannes", *Cahiers du cinéma*, April 1953, 6.

⁴⁹ Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), xxii.

⁵⁰ Marie, above cited, 54.

Christian-Jacque's *Adorables créatures* in *Cahiers du cinéma* of October 1952, titled "the cinema is dead". In his review, which actually anticipated Truffaut's attack of January 1954, Dorsday had derided mainstream output and described French cinema as "dead under the weight of its impeccable, perfect quality."⁵¹

Before Truffaut and the "Hitchcocko-Hawksians" took over *Cahiers du cinéma*, the journal had no fixed editorial line and was rather eclectic both in its choice of contributors and in its review articles. A glance at its contents in the early 1950s reveals an impressive pluralism of critical positions. This diversity of opinion meant that if certain directors such as Renoir or Chaplin were considered great filmmakers, the journal also ensured that a wide range of films and national cinemas received widespread critical attention. *Sight and Sound* editor Gavin Lambert and critic Lindsay Anderson⁵² both published articles in *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s and British films were extensively reviewed. In 1953, Charles Friend's *The Cruel Sea*, a war film in documentary style, even made the cover of the journal; applauded as a "very beautiful film" and Jack Hawkins' "great acting" as "the epitome of English integrity".⁵³ The arrival of François Truffaut at *Cahiers du cinéma*, however, marked a turning point. The term "quality" which had began to connote old-fashioned, bourgeois epics out of touch with modern life was eventually turned by Truffaut as a term of abuse with what he termed "A certain

⁵¹ quoted in Antoine de Baecque, *Cahiers du cinéma, Histoire d'une revue, Vol. 1, À l'assaut du cinéma, 1951-1959* (Paris: Éditions Cahiers du cinéma), 95.

⁵² Lindsay Anderson, "Lettre anglaise sur Becker", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 28, November 1953, 31-5.

⁵³ D. V., "The Cruel Sea", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 28, November 1953, 62.

tendency of the French cinema". The impetus for the *politique* can be dated back, as we saw in the previous chapter, to the late 40s when such an argument was developed by Alexandre Astruc in the leftist journal *L'Ecran français* with his article, "*Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde: la caméra stylo*".⁵⁴ As Michel Marie has noted,

Back in 1948, the definition of the cinema proposed by Astruc was at once very ambitious and quite abstract. It made no reference to the thematic content in the films discussed; thus it refused to follow the dominant critical approach of the epoch [...] it opposed the vocabulary supporting theories of an art that engages, which was central to Jean-Paul Sartre and others at *L'Ecran*.⁵⁵

Astruc's ideas experienced a spectacular renaissance with Truffaut's polemical article "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" which was the departure for the *politique* and added a completely new dimension to Astruc's theoretical position. Truffaut's long indictment of the highly respected directors belonging to the tradition of quality, such as Claude Autant-Lara, Jean Delannoy, René Clément and Yves Allégret whom he counterposed to "true men of the cinema", such as Jean Renoir, Max Ophuls, Jacques Becker, Abel Gance, Robert Bresson, Jacques Tati and Roger Leenhardt, "who often write their own dialogue and some of them invent themselves the stories they direct", became the effective manifesto of the New Wave. Truffaut expressed the programme very clearly and was particularly violent against the well-known scriptwriting team of Jean Aurenche and Pierre

⁵⁴ Alexandre Astruc: "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La caméra-stylo", originally published in *L'Écran Français*, no 144, 1948, translated in Peter Graham (ed.), *The New Wave, Critical Landmarks* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1968), 17-24.

⁵⁵ Michel Marie, above cited, 32.

Bost. Although André Bazin had engaged with quality cinema and generally defended literary adaptations, Truffaut denounced Aurenco and Bost for transposing novels to the screen with a kind of "psychological realism" which showed contempt for the specific qualities of the cinema. He also accused them of writing "frankly anti-clerical films" filled with "profanation and blasphemy" and socio-political statements. Finally, Truffaut defended the idea that it is impossible to appreciate both those directors belonging to the Tradition of Quality and those he considered *auteurs*, because he did not believe in the "peaceful co-existence of the tradition of quality and a cinema of *auteurs*".⁵⁶

From the mid-50s onwards, auteurism would become a fixture of film criticism and a series of highly influential polemics in French film journals shifted the emphasis away from the progressive or at least serious content of films, which were generally inspired by a spirit of social reform, onto subjective and personal aesthetic choices around individual authorship. British cinema that had been looked to for serious films different from Hollywood by the majority of film critics in the 1940s were routinely attacked whilst Hollywood commercial productions, previously dismissed by the critical establishment were relentlessly championed.

Truffaut's strategic indictment of mainstream cinema became the effective manifesto of the French New Wave and made him the leader of a rebellion of

⁵⁶ François Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema", in Bill Nicholls (ed.), *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) 233.

Young Turks that heralded a kind of revolution in the way in which films began to be discussed. His article against French cinema shifted the critical ground and marked the beginning of a period where criticism was viewed as a battle for symbolic power. As a critical strategy, auteurism would be practiced by several cinephile groups, including *Positif* and the Macmahonist journal *Présence du cinéma* led by Michel Mourlet that fostered the extreme of mise-en-scène criticism combined with extremely reactionary tendencies, advocating violence and mise-en-scène for its own sake. This tendency in film criticism, which has exerted an extremely important subterranean influence, was called after the cinema which catered for American troupes stationed in Paris specializing in showing popular American cinema in original version.⁵⁷ In the lobby of the cinema were gigantic photographs of Fritz Lang, Joseph Losey, Otto Preminger and Raoul Walsh, four Hollywood directors grandly designated by critic Pierre Rissient who founded the theatre as "*le Carré d'as*" (the Four Aces). The Macmahonist journal, *Présence du cinéma* (1961-66) was characterised by an unabashed streak of misogyny, a taste for male bonding that celebrated macho figures such as Charlton Heston and Samuel Fuller. The Macmahonists were close to *Cahiers du cinéma* at the time when Eric Rohmer took over as editor and gave it a rather extreme orientation. Rohmer's aesthetic extremism was also accompanied on occasion by a similar

⁵⁷ Jim Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du cinéma*, vol. 2, *The 1960s. New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1986), 113-121, and 132-134.

political extremism.⁵⁸

By 1955, *Cahiers du cinéma* had effected the transition to a radically auteurist direction of the magazine with the February 1955 issue where Truffaut's review of Jacques Becker's *Ali Baba et les quarante voleurs* (*Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, 1954) became a pretext to elaborate his polemical positions around the *politique des auteurs*.⁵⁹ Truffaut took to task those who denigrated Alfred Hitchcock and Howard Hawks as well as those who exalted the socially orientated films of John Huston. The specific of configuration of the kind of cinephilia practiced by the Young Turks at *Cahiers du cinéma* was characterised by a taste for abstraction and fetishist fascination at the expense of narrative and context and a general wish to evade social commitment in order to make room for subjectivity. Indeed, as Jim Hillier has argued, "any real sense of social determinants on cinema was to be progressively lost in *Cahiers*", even "Bazin's commitment to a *mise en scene* at the service of liberal-humanist subject matter and treatment".⁶⁰

Thus whereas in the previous decade, critics had taken the view that representing topical social issues was a worthy, responsible task for filmmakers, the *politique des auteurs* was bound up with an emphasis on aesthetics and a discrediting of politics. Truffaut's extremely enthusiastic review of *Doctor in the House* (Ralph Thomas, 1954), a light sex comedy concerned with the private affairs of young

⁵⁸ Antoine de Baecque, *Cahiers du cinéma, Histoire d'une revue. Vol. 1*, above cited, 172-179, Antoine de Baecque, "La morale est affaire de travelling (1), *Trafic*, 25, spring 1998, 112-136, (2), *Trafic*, 26, summer 1998, 122-138.

⁵⁹ François Truffaut, "Ali Baba et la politique des auteurs", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 44, 1955, 45-7.

⁶⁰ Hillier, 1985, 223.

medical students, reflects his apolitical posturing; Truffaut reads the film as humorous, harmless and deprived of authentic social background. This review also shows that for Truffaut, like his mentor Bazin quoted above, British humour was culture-specific and thus a criterion for linking British films:

This is an historical documentary - hardly romanticized - about British medical schools. It has no plot, no suspense, no drama, but a series of gags and of characters, calm good humour, and excellent actors - especially Kenneth Moore, one of the drivers in *Geneviève*, playing the role of a student who deliberately fails his exams because his grandmother has bequeathed him £1000 pound a years for as long as his studies last. All lovers of English humour have to see this movie. It has lots of spirit.⁶¹

It might also be useful to place this stance within the historical context of France where the Cold War had divided cultural life and opinion into hostile camps. Truffaut's vitriolic attacks on French cinema incited passionate debates and brought him the scorn of the critical community. However, it also won him a column in the weekly *Arts* where the promotional strategy of the New Wave was systematised and put further into practice. As his biographers Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana have observed,

Truffaut's writing style, press campaigns, and taste for provocation were typical of the literary right. It is no coincidence since the papers he wrote for, *Arts*, *La Parisienne*, *Le Temps de Paris*, or even *Cahiers du cinéma*, his personal contacts [...] and his pamphleteering style all suggest rebellion against academicism and the culturally dominant left-wing intellectual circles of the post-war period. Polemics raged between the two camps in the fifties, even if the Communist, social-Christian, humanist left vastly outnumbered the right.⁶²

⁶¹ François Truffaut, "Autres films", *Arts*, 493, December 1954.

⁶² Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana, *François Truffaut* (Paris; Folio, 1996), 168.

The *politique des auteurs* was Truffaut's hobbyhorse and it was he who most helped to institutionalise the advocacy of the *auteur*, thus making him the "leader". In his writings, Truffaut set up an opposition between film art and the conventional mainstream cinema and used the *politique* to attack the system and its personalities and to radically reform French cinema with the establishment of a cinema of *auteurs*. As John Hess has noted, "Truffaut's strategy was to attack most viciously those most recent trends in film history which seemed to be impeding the development he wanted to promote".⁶³

Its most important aspect was its articulation of aesthetic imperatives for a new French cinema: a personal cinema of small films. In his review of Sacha Guitry's *Assassins et voleurs* (*Murderers and Thieves*, 1957), for instance Truffaut praised the sloppy and hasty mise-en-scène, its lack of "aesthetic ambitions", a film "written hastily" and "patched together in a few weeks and judged unshowable by the Parisian distributors" but nevertheless "beating out Carol Reed's *Trapeze*, Jean Negulesco's *The Rains of Ranchipur*, Henri Decoin's *Folie-Bergères*, Yves Ciampi's *Typhoon Over Nagasaki*, and a number of international productions".⁶⁴

As an instrument of validation within the system of industrial production, as Michel Marie has noted, "the *politique* was thus provocative and paradoxical by

⁶³ John Hess, "La *politique des auteurs*, Part Two: Truffaut's Manifesto", *Jump Cut*, 2, July-August 1974, 20.

⁶⁴ François Truffaut, "Sacha Guitry: *Assassins et voleurs*", 1957, in François Truffaut, *The Films of My Life*, translated by Leonard Mayhew (London: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 214-6.

choice".⁶⁵ Thus while the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics made a cult of the individual artist within the Hollywood studio system of production, they despised the studio-bound French cinema of the 1940s and 1950s. Likewise, the rejection of mainstream French genre cinema, in particular costume dramas and serious social dramas, and the French star system led to the wholesale condemnation of French "formulaic" cinema which paradoxically went hand in hand with the praising of Hollywood "genres". Thus Truffaut launched vitriolic attacks against the established mainstream cinema, whilst American B-movies were constantly praised for their amateur aesthetics. Truffaut often employed the same tactics in his reviews of British films, contrasting for instance the "very very bad" *Quatermass Experiment*, ironically a low budget genre movie produced by the Hammer film studio, with "the best movie of the genre, *The Thing from Another World* since it was directed by Howard Hawks". This was a fantasy film that lacked fantasy and imagination, but then the entire British film industry lacked fantasy, enthusiasm, and warmth:

Imagination! A whole film! Imagination is what English cinema most cruelly lacks; in the cinema of that country, where stars look like their queen, everything is grey and ineffective, slow-witted and arduously painstaking. The British cinema is made of dullness and reflects a submissive life-style, where enthusiasm, warmth and zest are nipped in the bud. A film is born a loser just because it is English. Even a good script filmed by a good director and performed by good actors in England will most likely end up as a bad film. Why? This is the only mystery that English cinema has in store for us.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Michel Marie, above cited, 2003, 42.

⁶⁶ *Le Monstre*", *Arts* 615, 17-23 April 1957, 3, translated in Dixon, above cited, 80.

The hostility of Truffaut and his allies towards British cinema was exacerbated, and partly caused, by the aesthetic and ideological struggles which had begun to mark French film culture. The affinity of the Young Turks with the mass products of Hollywood also helped to create their counter-cultural image and their oppositional position in relation to established cultural politics and criticism. *Arts*, a publication of the literary right which was made up of the group of "Hussards" (Roger Nimier, Jacques Laurent, Antoine Blondin), was in the 1950s the main rival of leftist journals and magazines such as *Les Temps Modernes*, *Les Lettres françaises* or *L'Express*. Jacques Laurent (an intellectual whose family was nationalistic, anti-democratic and incidentally anti-British in the tradition of French naval officers) was the leading "Hussard", founding the newspaper *La Parisienne* and accepting the editorship of *Arts* under the banner of "political non-commitment". The Hussards defined themselves as right-wing anarchists and openly mocked the doctrinaire Stalinism of the Communist Party and the political engagement promoted by Sartre. This, according to his biographers, was a cause Truffaut could identify with,

In *Cahiers*, he fought against supporters of 'films with a message', praising form and mise-en-scène over the screenplay. But this cause was judged reactionary; lack of political commitment was associated with individualism, egoism, formal innovation, dandyism - so many attitudes impeding the values of cultural, political, and moral reconstruction inspired by the Liberation.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ de Baecque and Toubiana, above cited, *ibid*.

As a regularly published critic throughout the 50s, Truffaut kept his destructive enterprise going with articles in the right-wing cultural weekly *Arts-Lettres-Spectacles* where he relentlessly attacked what current criticism called "good cinema". Truffaut denounced national film productions which he opposed to the artist's personality and him and his cohorts the "Young Turks" were unanimous in their aversion toward European popular genres. Within these politics of taste, European films were thus positioned as the bad other to the small Hollywood B-film.

In this context, it becomes less difficult to see why Truffaut reacted negatively towards British cinema, which had been associated with authenticity and realism, at a time when reality in art was associated with the humanist left. The critical backlash against British films which ensued thus also became a way to provoke the establishment and to promoting one's own values through the creation of bad "Others"; praising directors and mise-en-scène against the analysis of social reality which became associated with academicism and middlebrow values; the "wrong" kind of cinema. Truffaut often contrasted directors such as Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock, Nicholas Ray or Billy Wilder against the critically acclaimed cinema of previous years, for instance *Brief Encounter* which had been, as we have seen in the previous chapter, greatly admired for its representation of psychological realism:

But the film Wilder constantly refers to, so that every scene becomes a vengeful slap, is David Lean's *Brief Encounter* with its streams of tears and its amorously backward couple, the least sensual and the most sentimental film ever wept over. Some people even weep thinking of it - inexhaustible

tears from English crocodiles [...] If *The Seven Years Itch* were only a weapon aimed at the English cinema it would already be estimable for its attempt at demystification.⁶⁸

A central idea was to extol "minor" works, especially if they had been held in contempt by the film establishment. This theme was repeated, exploited and amplified by the "Young Turks" to condemn the "bourgeois" character of the mainstream commercial cinema, advancing instead cinema as personal expression where the artist is positioned as a romantic artist. Truffaut often applied the same critical strategy in his reviews of British films but often fell back on historical French images of englishness, as if British directors were so many Major Thompsons.⁶⁹ Thus while the denigration of British cinema, and especially the flourishing war film genre, can be seen on the one hand as expressive of Truffaut's aversion for "films with a message", on the other it could also be read as an effort to downplay the heroic role of the British during the war. A number of war films produced in the 1950s such as the war epic *Cockleshell Heroes* (José Ferrer, 1955) in Cinemascope and co-produced with American studios were thus the target of his provocative Anglophobia:

Most films are rather good at the moment, except those coming from

⁶⁸ Truffaut, "Billy Wilder: *The Seven Year Itch*", *Arts*, 1956, in *The Films in My Life*, translated by Leonard Mayhew (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 160.

⁶⁹ Major W Marmaduke Thompson, the French stereotype of the perfect Englishman abroad, with his bowler hat, tightly rolled umbrella, neatly clipped moustache, Savile Row tailoring and stiff upper lip was the subject of humorous book by Pierre Daninos published in 1954, *Les Carnets du Major Thompson*. Purporting to be translating the notebooks and observations on the French of this retired Indian army officer, who is married to a Frenchwoman and living in France, the book was immensely popular and adapted to the screen in 1955. A French production directed by the Hollywood director Preston Sturges, the film was released abroad as *The French, They are a Funny Race*.

England [...] English humour will always be suspect as long as it doesn't target the Royal Family. This moderation, this control, these limits have a dampening effect that is not without hypocrisy [...] I am also exasperated by English discretion faced with pain: 'look at us, we do not cry, our emotions are intimate; we are great' [...] Behind this national humour, this bargain basement composure, dawns the film that is always the same.⁷⁰

Truffaut's hostility towards professionalism, large budgets and mainstream genres was one of the fundamental creeds of the New Wave, while in French cinema Jean-Pierre Melville's self-produced *Le Silence de la mer* (1947) and Agnès Varda's *La Pointe courte* (1954) provided two main reference points. As noted earlier, British film production in the 1950s was marked by development of the international co-production, or "runaway" production. The directors singled out as making "bad" films were often the most commercially successful, such as David Lean and Carol Reed, two leading directors of quality British cinema who were loathed by the French New Wave. Unlike the Hollywood directors of narrative movies made with large crews which were deemed to input their vision primarily through the mise-en-scène such as Alfred Hitchcock and Howard Hawks, their hugely expensive international super productions, professional approach to filmmaking and tackling of serious subject matter, was particularly targeted by the French New Wave. David Lean, in particular, was Truffaut's *bête noire* and most of his vitriolic attacks on the director were used as a springboard for the affirmation of his rhetoric of cinema as personal expression grounded in a discourse of anti-professionalism. Thus for instance *Summer Madness* (1955), an

⁷⁰ François Truffaut, "*Commando dans la gironde*", *Arts*, Truffaut Collection. Fonds Truffaut, Bibliothèque du film, Paris.

international production and glossy rerun of *Brief Encounter* set in Venice with Katharine Hepburn, had a "backward and flatulent aesthetic" which in effect "made cinema regress ten years."⁷¹

Adapted from a French novel by Pierre Boulle, David Lean's 1957 *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, a three million dollar epic produced by Sam Spiegel which won several Oscars and other awards, was the top grossing film at the French box-office for the 1957 season⁷², followed by *Sissi* (E. Marischka) and *Le Triporteur* (Jacques Pinoteau).⁷³ However, there was a great contrast between the opinion expressed in the mainstream press on one side, and the cinephiles on the other. The Communist *L'Humanité*⁷⁴, like the Catholic *La Croix*⁷⁵ and *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision*⁷⁶ as well as the centre-left *Le Monde*⁷⁷, gave the film glowing reviews and urged their readers to watch this film. *The Bridge on the River Kwai* was generally praised for its tackling of a serious subject matter and its exploration of the absurdity of war but it was also noted that this was very high quality cinema. In contrast, although critic Jacques Doniol-Valcroze described the film as "explosive", to this critic it was also harking back to 1940s films such as John

⁷¹ Truffaut, "Vacances à Venise", *Arts*, Novembre 1955, Truffaut Collection, Fonds François Truffaut, Bibliothèque du Film, Paris.

⁷² That year 39 British films were imported into France, compared with 113 from America, 17 from Italy and West Germany. As a percentage of foreign films imported into France in 1957, British films represented 4,6 %, American film 32,3 % and films from Italy 4,4%.

⁷³ *Le Film français*, 727-728, Spring 1958, 57.

⁷⁴ J. D. "Le Pont de la rivière Kwai, la guerre, ses absurdités et ses folies", *L'Humanité*, 25 December 1957.

⁷⁵ Jean Rochereau, "Le Pont de la river Kwai", *La Croix*, 28 December 1957.

⁷⁶ Gilbert Salachas, "Films 'de guerre' pour ou contre? ... A propos du *Pont de la rivière Kwai*", *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision*, 12 January 1958.

⁷⁷ Jean de Baroncelli, "Le Pont de la rivière Kwai", *Le Monde*, 25 December 1957.

Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940).⁷⁸ André Bazin also expressed strong reservations, observing in *Cahiers du cinéma* that although the film was "of extraordinary high quality", its artistic place "was not the highest" [...] we must naturally prefer Bernanos to Rudyard Kipling, let alone to Pierre Boulle, just as we prefer Renoir and Fellini to David Lean".⁷⁹ Adding to the chorus of disapproval was Eric Rohmer who, contrasting the film with Nicholas Ray's *Bitter Victory* (1957), found the film "spectacular and pretentious" and David Lean's directing "like that of other directors from across the Channel [...] had no style or originality [...] British cinema will always lag behind".⁸⁰ Finally, compared with a "true" artist such as Orson Welles, the *Bridge on the River Kwai* was a film, according to Truffaut, "made by incompetent cynics". As a "big theme" epic with polished photography and a large international budget, it was a particularly overt example of the flaws Truffaut had pointed out and named in the French Tradition of Quality:

For a real filmmaker, nothing could be more boring than to make a *Bridge on the River Kwai*: scenes set inside offices alternating with discussions between old fogies and some action scenes usually filmed by another crew. Rubbish, traps for fools, Oscar machines. Hitchcock has never won an Oscar.⁸¹

One important aspect of this critical strategy was that British cinema gradually

⁷⁸ Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, "Un film explosif: *Le Pont de la rivière Kwai*", *France-Observateur*, 19 December 1957.

⁷⁹ André Bazin, "High Infidelity", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 14, February 1958, 50-3, translated in Bert Cadullo, above cited, 229, 230.

⁸⁰ Eric Rohmer, "*Le Pont de la rivière Kwai*: spectaculaire et prétentieux", *Arts*, 1957.

⁸¹ François Truffaut, "*Touch of Evil*", 1958, in Mayhew, above cited, 288.

became assimilated as another version, even a caricature of the Tradition of Quality. The blockbuster super productions specifically targeted by "the six characters in search of *auteurs*" round table discussion in *Cahiers du cinéma* of 1957 had included *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Jean Delannoy) who had broken box office records for the 1956-7 season and the films of Claude Autant-Lara, Henri-Georges Clouzot and René Clément. As Jacques Rivette observed,

I think that French cinema at the moment is unwittingly another version of British cinema, or to put it another way, it's a British cinema not recognised as such, because it's the work of people who are none the less talented [...] British cinema is a genre cinema, but one where genres have no genuine roots. On the one hand, there is no self-validating genres as there are in American cinema, like the Western and the thriller [...] Anyway most of them are only imitations of American imitations. And on the other hand, it isn't an *auteur* cinema either, since none of them has anything to say. It's a cinema that limps along, caught between two stools, a cinema based on supply and demand [...].⁸²

In their effort to distinguish the cinema further from literature, Truffaut and the *Cahiers* critics began to tease out its specificity as residing in mise-en-scène. As the subject matter and the script became of less importance, they concerned themselves predominantly with the analysis of mise-en-scène as "to a large extent the very stuff of the film, an organization of beings and things which is its own meaning unto itself - moral meaning as well as the aesthetic".⁸³ The dogma of the *politique* was accompanied by a mystical stance on mise-en-scène; through the

⁸²Jacques Rivette in, "Six Characters in Search of auteurs: a discussion about French cinema", originally published in *Cahiers du cinéma*, 71, May 1957, translated in Hillier, above cited, 32.

⁸³André Bazin, "Comment peut-on être Hitchcocko-Hawksien", *Cahiers du cinéma* 44, February 1955, translated in Hillier, above cited, 223. See also Luc Moullet's "morality is a question of tracking shots" in "Sam Fuller: sur les brisées de Marlowe", *Cahiers*, no 93, 1959, reprised by Godard as "tracking shots are a question of morality" in the discussion, "Hiroshima, notre amour", *Cahiers*, 97, 1959 and Jacques Rivette, "De L'abjection", *Cahiers*, 120, June 1961.

deployment of actors and objects in the time and space of the shot, the director would communicate his moral stance of life; style was thus expressive of a director's vision of the world. Aesthetically, according to Truffaut, English films suffered from a number of afflictions: insipidity, decency and dullness, awkwardness and conformism, in short they lacked originality, personal style and *auteurs*. Truffaut's review of *The Stranger Left No Card* (*Trois Meurtres*, Wendy Toye, David Eady, Georges More O' Ferral, 1955) is typical,

No critic dares to have it out with British cinema once and for all. However, 'one' quite simply does not watch it anymore. To say British cinema was dead would be excessive since it has never existed [...] Platitude and blandness are its twin pillars [...] Style is what English cinema lacks the most. The best English films being less well directed than a Z-rate French or American film, one must conclude that there exists a sixth sense - that of cinema - and that the English do not possess it.⁸⁴

This argument on realism was inflected by a Catholic notion of revelation indebted to Bazin's notion of cinema as the epiphany of reality. The Young Turks thus read film, as Antoine de Baecque has noted, from the point of view of a "*métaphysique de l'incarnation de la grace*", a metaphysical incarnation of divine grace, approaching cinema as a religious narrative of the real.⁸⁵

The policy of vilification against British cinema was so excessive that it can be assumed that it was aimed at a larger target. As we will see, Alfred Hitchcock was considered the foremost inventor of forms and symbolic elements connected to metaphysics. It is now time to turn to the dynamics between the *politique des*

⁸⁴ François Truffaut, "*Trois Meurtres*", *Arts*, February 1955.

⁸⁵ "Génie du christianisme", in de Baecque, above cited, 83-87.

auteurs, Alfred Hitchcock and British cinema.

Politique des auteurs, Hitchcock and British cinema

The most obvious consequence of the *politique des auteurs* was the constitution of a new canon. The establishment of a "pantheon" was effected by the publication in *Cahiers du cinéma* of several special issues devoted to individual directors with their interview. Once a filmmaker had been interviewed by the journal, he became fully recognized and distinguished as an *auteur de film*. *Cahiers du cinéma* produced four issues devoted to Alfred Hitchcock and the 1950s period saw the gradual critical rehabilitation of the director. More than Howard Hawks, Orson Welles, Roberto Rossellini or even Jean Renoir, in the 1950s, "Alfred Hitchcock is cinema no matter what he does".⁸⁶

With hindsight, film historians are now aware that during the 1950s Hitchcock's career was at its peak. However, in the early 50s, the case of Hitchcock's importance as a director had yet to be made, since traditional criticism still regarded him as nothing more than a technician of the Hollywood machine. For this reason, the definition of the stylistic and thematic identity of Hitchcock as an *auteur* was central to the critical battle that sought to assert the primary role of the individual film director in the creation of a cinematic text. This had major consequences for the reception of British cinema overall since auteurism, based on

⁸⁶ Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol: *Hitchcock, The First Forty-Four Films*, first published in 1957 (Paris: Editions Universitaires), translated by Stanley Hochmann (United States of America: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1979), 152.

the 19C Romantic vision of the artist's personal vision as paramount, transcending the team-work of filmmaking and grounding aesthetic autonomy as an essential quality of cinematic creation was in itself antithetical to a more general consideration of cinema. Moreover, the staunchly entrenched positions of the Hitchcocko-Hawksians against those critics who reviewed Hitchcock's films condescendingly or even with contempt meant they had to create a contrasting stereotype. In order to promote Hitchcock, and by extension the *politique des auteurs*, they set up an opposition between the genius of one against the rest. As this section will show, one of the most striking points about the critical discourse on British cinema was that its negative evaluation was always accompanied by a comparison with Hitchcock. As de Baecque and Toubiana have observed, for Truffaut, "the image of the *auteur* is reserved to the emblematic figure of Alfred Hitchcock", a large amount of his writings are dedicated to the director, twenty-seven overall during the 1950s; "the master of suspense is the object of a genuine cult".⁸⁷

As with most *Cahiers* approved *auteurs*, Hitchcock was revered for the metaphysics implied by his style. According to this view, Hitchcock was a genius of cinematic form that had created a distinctive moral vision of the human condition, a vision that had deepened during his time in America. Claude Chabrol and Eric Rohmer published the first book-length study of Hitchcock's films in late 1957 by *Editions Universitaires* in the "*Classiques du cinéma*" series under the

⁸⁷ Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana, above cited, 1992, 67.

direction of Jean Mitry. In their book entitled *Hitchcock*, Chabrol and Rohmer were intent on showing the director as a metaphysical and formal genius,

Hitchcock is one of the greatest inventors of forms in the entire history of the cinema. Perhaps only Murnau and Eisenstein can sustain comparison with him when it comes to form. Our effort will not have been in vain if we have been able to demonstrate how an entire moral universe has been elaborated on the basis of form and by its very rigor. In Hitchcock's work, form does not embellish content, it creates it. All of Hitchcock can be summed up in this formula.⁸⁸

Chabrol and Rohmer's emphasis on the Catholic content of Hitchcock's films provided a cornerstone in the Hitchcockian exegesis. The theme of the transfer of guilt also provided a thematic link between all of Hitchcock's films, in particular *I Confess* (1953), about a Catholic priest and *The Wrong Man* (1956), which had a strong theological theme. As de Baecque has observed,

It must be emphasised that the Hitchcockian line defended by *Cahiers du cinéma*, was constructed from the point of view of a spiritualist approach to the great realist directors. In this sense, Hitchcock, the previous pupil of a Jesuit college who launches in his works a series of 'religious films' illustrates particularly well the *politique* of his passionate advocates and thus comforted them in their approach to cinema as a religious narrative of the real.⁸⁹

Shortly after Truffaut's attack on the Tradition of Quality, the journal had published a "Hitchcock special".⁹⁰ This special issue not only heralded the editorial line of the journal concerning the *politique des auteurs* but also stirred up

⁸⁸ Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, above cited, 152.

⁸⁹ Antoine de Baecque, 2003, above cited, 118.

⁹⁰ *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Alfred Hitchcock*, 39, October 1954.

intense polemics within critical circles.⁹¹ When this campaign was launched to advance Hitchcock's pre-eminence as an *auteur* it was met with disbelief in Britain and generated intense polemics within French critical circles.⁹² The increasing marginalisation of British cinema in the critical discourse of *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Arts* was compounded and reinforced by the declining critical support for Alfred Hitchcock in his native country. What is important in the context of this chapter is that the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics were engaged in a polemic with the detractors of Hitchcock from both sides of the Channel.

In Britain, Hitchcock's American films had been the object of scurrilous attacks by leading film critics. Such distinguished critics as Gavin Lambert and Lindsay Anderson, a founder of the Oxford-based film journal *Sequence*, accused Hitchcock of having been in decline since his departure for Hollywood. According to Lambert, Hitchcock, like Anthony Asquith, was

Talented but minor [...] his talent had been cut short. In the US Hitchcock directed entertaining films but they have not marked any progression from his earliest work [...] he continues on his vacuous way from which he rarely escapes. A void which is unfortunately the lot of many British directors.⁹³

Towards the end of the 1940s, Lindsay Anderson's position in *Sequence* had established the British line on Hitchcock who was castigated for his improbable plots, superficiality, commercialism, attraction to technical virtuosity for its own

⁹¹ Antoine de Baecque, above cited, 1991, 192.

⁹² de Baecque, *ibid.*

⁹³ Gavin Lambert, *Lettre de Londres*, *Cahiers du cinéma*, July-August, 1952, 43.

sake and "stylistic elephantiasis".⁹⁴ In a review of French film criticism for *Sight and Sound* in 1954, the British critic reacted forcefully to the *Cahiers du cinéma* special issue on Hitchcock and castigated the journal for short-changing analysis in favour of dithyramb,

Almost completely taken over by the covey of bright young things whose eccentric enthusiasms, paraded so generously in recent issues, have already sadly impaired its reputation. Here they are more vociferous and preposterous than ever. To the accompaniment of a ceremonial of mutual backslapping, Hitchcock is hoisted into the Pantheon - up there with Murnau, Renoir and Howard Hawks [...] Can absurdity go further? The answer is, yes. In the course of this issue, Hitchcock is compared with Dostoevski, Faulkner, Bernanos, Nietzsche, Rousseau, Hardy, Richardson, Poe (a classical poet, apparently), Meredith, Homer, Aeschylus, Corneille, Balzac and Shakespeare. More marvellous still, all this is done on the strength of a handful of Hitchcock's American films [...] But, strange as it may seem, all this admiration for Hitchcock does not inspire in these critics the slightest interest in his work as a whole; there is not a word in the whole issue on his British films.⁹⁵

Similar condemnations were voiced in France. In 1949, the Communist *L'Ecran français* which contrasted the artistry of European directors with the commercialism of Hollywood products seducing away French audiences, had attacked Hitchcock, whose *Rope* (1948) had just been praised by Jacques Doniol-Valcroze in *La Revue du cinéma*.⁹⁶ In 1952, *Positif*, the ideological and geographical counterpoint to *Cahiers du cinéma* had been founded in Lyon. Whereas the writers at *Cahiers du cinéma* specialised in criticism of an abstract

⁹⁴ Lindsay Anderson, "Alfred Hitchcock", *Sequence*, 9, Autumn 1949, 113-124.

⁹⁵ Lindsay Anderson, "French Critical Writing", *Sight and Sound*, 24, 2, October-December 1954, 105.

⁹⁶ Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, "Festival Hitchcock: *Spellbound*, *Rebecca*, *Suspicion*", *La Revue du cinéma*, 15, July 1948, 72-7.

metaphysical nature which involved "seeing directors as if they were priests"⁹⁷, *Positif* saw itself as more socially engaged and was enraged by the Hitchcocko-Hawksian tendency which they considered as a hotbed of the conservative right. *Positif* vaunted politically committed directors such as Vigo, Buñuel and Huston while castigating "Young Turk" favourites such as Hawks and Hitchcock, arguing that the form should not be separated from the content. The surrealist Ado Kyrrou described Hitchcock's films as "lousy thrillers", castigated Truffaut and branded the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics as young fascists and intellectual vigilantes who were using Hitchcock for propagandist purposes, while critic Louis Seguin argued that, "Yes, without doubt we must despise Alfred Hitchcock."⁹⁸ In the mid-50s *Positif* initiated a virulent attack against Hitchcock and its oppositional stance solidified with a collection of critical essays published in 1960 by *Positif* editor Bernard Chardère.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, Georges Sadoul also launched several attacks against the Hitchcockians in the daily press. In his review of *Dial M for Murder* (1953) entitled "*Opération Hitchcock*", for instance, he attempted to prove the superiority of Hitchcock's British films by mentioning the negative views of critics from across the Channel.¹⁰⁰

In February 1955, *Cahiers* issued a second Hitchcock number where Bazin

⁹⁷ Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Le vrai coupable: Two Kinds of Criticism in Godard's Work", *Screen*, 40, 3, autumn 1999, 310-1.

⁹⁸ Ado Kyrrou, "Mais qui a lancé Alfred?", *Les Lettres Nouvelles*, March 1957, quoted in de Baecque, 1991, above cited, 132, Louis Seguin, *Positif*, 14-15, 1955, quoted in Vest, above cited, 87.

⁹⁹ Alfred Hitchcock, *Premier Plan*, 7, (Lyon: Société d'Etudes, de Recherche et de Documentation cinématographique, 1960).

¹⁰⁰ Georges Sadoul, "Opération Hitchcock", *Les Lettres françaises*, February 1955.

underscored his support for the formalist approach of the Young Turks, citing Sartre, who had claimed that "every technique testified to a metaphysics".¹⁰¹ Geneviève Sellier, in her analysis of the socio-cultural aspects of French cinephilia in the 1950s, has argued that there is a contradiction in Bazin's writings between his pedagogical interest in a democratic approach to culture and his abstracting and idealising outlook. She contends that Bazin, who valued the transcendental qualities of cinema above its social dimension, was typical of 1950s cinephilia and sees his emphasis on aesthetics and form as an intimation of his need, as a French intellectual, to legitimate cinema as an art in the most traditional sense of the term.¹⁰² Thus, although he had clear misgivings about the *politique des auteurs*, the furore caused by the Hitchcock number prompted Bazin to defend his colleagues thus,

The special issue of *Cahiers du cinéma* dedicated to Alfred Hitchcock has created quite a stir. It has caused us, apart from receiving virulent mail, to be violently criticised by some of our colleagues (Georges Sadoul, Denis Marion ...) and more recently by Lindsay Anderson in *Sight and Sound* [...] the fact that their erudition is not founded on the same criteria of value than that of seasoned or British critics does not make it less effective [...] In spite of our quarrels, and apart from our love of cinema, which is obvious, one belief that underlies all our judgements is our guarded refusal to reduce cinema to what it expresses.¹⁰³

Hitchcock's French recognition took place at the *Cinémathèque Française* when in 1956 a retrospective of British films was organised that included eighteen of

¹⁰¹ André Bazin, "Comment peut-on être Hitchcocko-Hawksien?", *Cahiers du cinéma*, February 1955, 17-8.

¹⁰² Geneviève Sellier, "Cinéphilie et masculinité" (II), *Iris*, 26, October, 1998, 202.

¹⁰³ André Bazin, above cited, *ibid*.

Hitchcock's early films. Founded in 1936 by Henri Langlois, Georges Franju and Jean Mitry, the *Cinémathèque* was a great generator of taste. Its role in educating a whole generation of cinephiles and giving them a grounding in film history has been widely acknowledged. As an organization that not only preserved films but also screened them on its own premises, the *Cinémathèque* acted both like a museum (the *Musée Permanent du cinéma* was inaugurated in 1948), and a film school for the French New Wave. As the Hitchcock question crystallised all the tensions in French film culture, Henri Langlois, director of the *Cinémathèque* at the time also contributed to the Hitchcock controversy in his own idiosyncratic way:

This cycle of films serves up a surprise. We are at last going to discover British cinema [...] over which an immense shadow has been cast, hiding from us its true evolution; we are unable to get an exact view of it, and anyway where could we seek information? In England? British cinema's greatest detractors are in London. To convince oneself it suffices to open one of those erudite works published across the Channel that are considered bibles of cinema aesthetics and theory. Can one dream of more violent criticism, more negative assessments? It is like Louis Delluc castigating the old French cinema in 1917 [...] nothing finds favour before *Bank Holiday*, except the avant-garde documentary school.¹⁰⁴

Although Hitchcock's latest films received the most extensive treatment, Claude Chabrol and Eric Rohmer's book on Hitchcock also discussed the director's British films in a coverage that was necessarily sketchy, hindered by the unavailability of early Hitchcock's films but helped by the recent *Cinémathèque* retrospective of the

¹⁰⁴ Henri Langlois, *Trois cents ans de cinéma, Ecrits* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma/Cinémathèque française, 1986), 152-3.

previous year. As James M. Vest has observed, the book's publication was a major coup for the fanatical Hitchcockians and marked a turning point in the Hitchcock wars. It also contradicted Anderson's accusations that English Hitchcock had not been given any serious attention. Moreover, as James M. Vest has observed,

Since this substantial reflection on their commonly held tenets was published in an accessible format by a respectable press that could market it internationally, their positions and theses could no longer be ignored.¹⁰⁵

The pro-Hitchcock campaign was pursued on two fronts, in *Cahiers* and at *Arts* where, when he came across a British film, Truffaut's critical stratagem was to contrast the mediocrity of British cinema *en masse* with the genius of one, Hitchcock, thus vindicating the *politique* by means of the vilification of British cinema. Accordingly a film such as *L'Affaire Manderson* (*The Manderson Affair* (Herbert Wilcox, 1953) proved that British cinema had been at a loss since Hitchcock's departure, "without Hitchcock, British cinema has lost for many of us its best reasons to exist".¹⁰⁶

Thus, as "L'affaire Hitchcock" was discussed in most of French daily newspapers and cultural publications, *Arts* established itself as a major contender in the Hitchcock debates.¹⁰⁷ In *Arts*, Truffaut achieved star status through his polemical articles, responsible for the film reviews section and using this platform to advance the cause of the Hitchcocko-Hawksians and spread the rhetoric of the

¹⁰⁵ James M. Vest, *Hitchcock and France, The Forging of an Auteur* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 2003), 165.

¹⁰⁶ *The Manderson Affair*, signed Robert Lachenay, *Arts*, Truffaut Collection. Fonds François Truffaut, Bibliothèque du Film.

¹⁰⁷ James M. Vest, above cited, 25.

politique des auteurs by launching vicious attacks against the whole film establishment, including critics, scriptwriters and directors. *Arts* allowed Truffaut to publicize his ideas outside the narrow confines of cinephilia and to advance a new form of criticism founded on an "openly sectarian, vitriolic, often violent and entrenched judgement of taste, often taking the risk of being peremptory and unjust."¹⁰⁸

The *politique* was buoyantly orchestrated with reviews celebrating Max Ophuls, Sacha Guitry, Roberto Rossellini or Robert Aldrich. Eventually promoted to the highly sought after position of reporter for the Cannes and Venice film festivals, Truffaut, who had started directing, invited his friends Rivette, Rohmer and Godard to write tendentious articles *ad hominem*. Taking their lead from the incendiary tone of Truffaut's brand of reviewing, they adopted a sarcastic and polemical approach that is reflected in their critical reviews of British films. As Eric Rohmer has recalled in Serge Toubiana and Michel Pascal's film on François Truffaut, *Portraits volés* (1994), "to live up to Truffaut's reviews, one had to be as mean as him".

Truffaut's review of *Shoot First*, an American film by Robert Parrish, produced by Stanley Kramer and shot in Britain gives him an opportunity to attack both French critics and British cinema whilst at the same time highlighting the "genius" of Hitchcock:

The film corresponds to the idea which half-witted critics have about

¹⁰⁸ de Baecque and Toubiana, above cited, 71.

Hitchcock, the "master of suspense". Here all is bluff, faked, unseemly effect. Shot in England, this film breathes the English countryside, English soberness, English humour, English flatness, and English non-existence. Not one invention, not one detail, not a single idea.¹⁰⁹

Truffaut's invective against another British film, *Piège pour une canaille!* (*Confession*, Ken Hughes, 1955), treated it as a pastiche of Hitchcock's American films:

The decadence of British cinema has become proverbial [...] Here the whole of Hitchcock's American period is passing before our eyes, not doubt very much admired but badly understood, badly digested, all in all caricatured in this sinister film [...] *Confession* proves the genius of Hitchcock.¹¹⁰

Truffaut concluded his report on the 1956 Venice film festival thus: "No British films have been accepted because British cinema is dead".¹¹¹ Jean-Luc Godard concurred with Truffaut that these flaws were endemic to the current state of British cinema. In his review of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (*La Femme en robe de chambre*, J. Lee Thompson, 1957), a melodrama and a "social" problem film, Godard resorted to the same tactics when he lamented the aesthetic inferiority and the insipidity of British films in contrast with the genius of Hitchcock:

One really has to rack one's brains to find something to say about a British film. One wonders why. However, that is the way it is. And there isn't even an exception to prove the rule [...] So lunatic is the direction that the insipidity - Mr Thompson's original touch - is at least rather different from the sort which has characterised Her Gracious Majesty's films since the departure of the filmmaker who knew too much, the man of the *Thirty-Nine*

¹⁰⁹ François Truffaut, "Notes sur d'autres films", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 26, August-September 1953, 59, signed "François de Monferrand", translated in Dixon, above cited, 35.

¹¹⁰ François Truffaut, "Piège pour une canaille de Ken Hughes", *Arts*, 1956, Truffaut Collection, Fonds François Truffaut, Bibliothèque du Film.

¹¹¹ *Arts*, 583, 1956.

Steps [...] Like football, the British cinema today is an enigma as much as a legend. How have the descendants of Daniel Defoe, Thomas Hardy and Georges Meredith reached such a degree of incompetence in matters of art? [...] No, it really is enough to make one despair. Except that to despair of the British cinema would be to admit that it exists.¹¹²

Eric Rohmer is even less measured in tone in his review of *Wicked as they come* (*Portrait d'une aventurière*, Ken Hughes, 1956), a film he otherwise described as “a dried up old pudding”:

This is very much an English film of the most brackish, the most dull, the most mean-minded, the most narrow-minded kind [...] Why charge at the British cinema, some would ask? Because a English film be it by X or Y is, above all English; because it would be a lost cause to want to distinguish the style of X and Y, assuming that they have a style, but that we can on the other hand very well recognise, the works of X or Y amongst the rubbish films that travel the world by their English family likeness. The fact that Hitchcock is English does not change the matter, neither the fact that monsieur Ken Hughes, good luck to him, perhaps thinks he is Hitchcock!¹¹³

These reviews seemed determined to resurrect the old cultural stereotype of the British lack of visual culture and of Britain as a country constitutionally incapable of thinking in visual terms, a characteristic of pre-war French survey histories of cinema as we have seen. According to Peter Wollen, the enduring French idea that the English have no visual culture may hark back to the transformation of the Louvre from royal palace to national museum after the French Revolution, a period that marked the beginning of the modern epoch of the art museum. According to Wollen, Denon, Napoleon's chosen director for the Louvre,

¹¹² Jean-Luc Godard, "La Femme en robe de chambre", *Arts*, 680, July 1958, translated in Tom Milne, *Godard on Godard* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), 85-6.

¹¹³ Eric Rohmer, *Portrait d'une aventurière*, *Arts*, 1957, emphasis in text.

Amassed paintings and sculptures from Napoleon's conquests and then inventoried and displayed them in a scholarly manner, following a chronological scheme, while grouping work together in distinct national schools: Italian, French, Northern (Flemish, Dutch, German) and Spanish. [...] Denon's institution was basically a national and, indeed, imperial project, and this was reflected in the organisation of the display: the various national schools were all part of Napoleon's (and France's empire). Hence the absence of a British school (and perhaps the enduring French myth that the British have no visual culture.¹¹⁴

The impact of the *politique des auteurs* at the beginning of the 60s is reflected in the condescending reactions that met the films of the British New Wave in *Cahiers du cinéma*. If other British films represented the commercially successful but critically disreputable mainstream end of British cinema in the 1950s, the British New Wave of the period between 1959 and 1963 occupied the other end of the spectrum. The films had their roots in Free cinema, in the journal *Sequence*, in British theatre and literature and were independently produced. They were critically acclaimed both in the mainstream press and in specialised film journals such as *Positif*, with the writings of Jean-Paul Török and Robert Benayoun (see next chapter) or *Jeune cinéma*. In *Cahiers* these films were often compared negatively with those of the French New Wave and relentlessly dismissed as, for instance, "even more boring than ridiculous."¹¹⁵

The anglophile Louis Marcorelles, although a *Cahiers* critic, was opposed to the Hitchcocko-Hawksian line and stayed regularly in London, writing for *The Guardian* and *Sight and Sound*. In *Cahiers du cinéma* Marcorelles often

¹¹⁴ Peter Wollen, *Paris Manhattan: Writings on Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 61.

¹¹⁵ *Look Back in Anger*, *Cahiers du cinéma*, 114, 1960, 67.

championed the independent productions of Free cinema such as *Together* (Lorenza Mazzetti, 1953)¹¹⁶ which were presented at the 1960 Tours Festival of shorts.¹¹⁷ Marcorelles, however, was scathing about mainstream British cinema, especially the productions of Arthur J. Rank which he often compared in their "badness" to the French Tradition of Quality.¹¹⁸

Thus we can see how a climate of opinion was established in which both mainstream British and French film was generally considered beyond cinephile taste. As a critical strategy, Truffaut's vitriolic attacks on British mainstream cinema worked to establish Alfred Hitchcock as the exception that confirmed the rule and served, by extension, to promote the discourse of the *politique des auteurs*. Although Truffaut's contribution to this discourse was decisive and was very important in terms of its influence over later French film criticism, his judgment on British cinema over the years was slightly more nuanced and inconsistent. It is to Truffaut and his critical legacy that we now turn.

Truffaut and his Critical Legacy

Truffaut's move into filmmaking had already started during his time as a critic with his first short, silent black and white 16mm *Une visite* in 1955 which was

¹¹⁶ Louis Marcorelles, "Together", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 107, May 1960, 50-2.

¹¹⁷ Louis Marcorelles, "Tours, ville ouverte", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 103, January 1960, 38-44.

¹¹⁸ See Louis Marcorelles, "Cette Angleterre", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 89, November 1958, 24-29 and "Londres 1960", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 105, March 1960, 35-9.

followed by *Les Mistons* in 1957. He was also an assistant to Rossellini in the mid-50s and his first feature film was ironically financed by his father-in-law, Ignace Morgenstern, head of the firm Cocinor and producer and distributor of commercially successful films in the French Tradition of Quality starring stars such as Fernandel or Gabin, films which Truffaut routinely lambasted in his reviews.

As de Baecque and Toubiana stress in their biography, Truffaut's style as a film critic was often mean-spirited and politically spiteful:

His moralistic intransigence in attacking the leading lights of French cinema sometimes induced him to take extreme, dubious, contradictory positions, as when he went so far as to praise American censorship in the January 1954 issue of *Cahiers*.¹¹⁹

As director Claude Chabrol has observed, because of his troubled childhood and social circumstances, he was an outsider with nothing to lose; "his back was to the wall and he had no fallback position".¹²⁰ Truffaut's articles must be considered explicitly or implicitly polemical and most of his vitriolic positions as purely strategic. Truffaut did not claim to be "a mentor but a strategist, meeting directors, attacking his adversaries, advancing his opinion with imaginativeness, bad faith, in an offhand manner, sometimes with a certain arrogance".¹²¹ Truffaut described himself as a "self-loathing autodidact".¹²² Most of his critical activity of the period, what he himself called his press campaigns, was based, according to

¹¹⁹ De Baecque and Toubiana, above cited, 85.

¹²⁰ Claude Pascal and Serge Toubiana, *François Truffaut Portraits volés*, 1993.

¹²¹ Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana, above cited, 156.

¹²² de Baecque and Toubiana, above cited, 162.

French producer Pierre Braunberger on both "a love of American cinema and a sense of what the new cinema would be" but also on "bad faith; he had decided to have prejudices".¹²³

Truffaut always claimed to be apolitical, and had affected a certain sympathy for the monarchist extreme-right and the critic Lucien Rebatet (a famous critic and anti-Semite writing under the pseudonym of François Vinneuil during the Occupation), yet paradoxically, he was one of the few directors (with Alain Resnais and Claude Sautet) to sign the "*Manifeste des 121*" petition of September 1960, defending the right of insubordination in the Algerian war.

Truffaut's cinephile identification with the "master of suspense" was so strong that he had begun to incorporate Hitchcock in his own films. Four of the films he directed around the time of the interview book with Hitchcock in 1962, *La Peau douce* (*The Soft Skin*, 1964), *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), *La Mariée était en noir* (*The Bride Wore Black*, 1967) and *La Sirène du Mississippi* (*Mississippi Mermaid*, 1969), are, as Annette Insdorf had noted, "his most 'Hitchcockian' in terms of theme, tone and technique".¹²⁴ By the early 60s, Truffaut had had the idea of putting together a book of conversations with Hitchcock as a vehicle for upgrading his reputation in America and Britain where he felt the director was still under recognised. It is thus not surprising to find his strategic rejection of British cinema in the famous book of interviews with Alfred Hitchcock. Moreover, although the

¹²³ Pierre Braunberger, "Comment atteindre la tour Eiffel", in *Le roman de François Truffaut* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma/Editions de l'Etoile, 1985), 52.

¹²⁴ Annette Insdorf, *François Truffaut* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 44.

publication of Truffaut's book was delayed for a few years and the English edition not published until the summer of 1967, the week-long interview took place in a year marked by the beginning of the first James Bond series of films with *Dr No* (Terence Young), an Ian Fleming adaptation that had had an extraordinary impact worldwide. For Truffaut, however, the films were “nothing else than a rough caricature of all Hitchcock's work, and of *North by Northwest* in particular”¹²⁵ Truffaut held *Dr No* responsible for ushering the beginning of a period of decadence in cinema and the forced decline of his "invented" father:

At this point we might reopen the old polemic about Hitchcock. For years, English critics were reluctant to accept that the films Hitchcock made in America were superior to those he had made in England. The difference for me lies in the fact that Hitchcock's desire to make the audience believe the story is stronger in his American films than in his English ones [...] But the reason I talk of a period of decadence ushered by the Bond films is that before that parody had been of only a minority of snob appeal, but with the Bond films it became a popular genre [...] What's more, Hitchcock's career began to suffer from the time of the first Bond films, since they were a sort of plagiarised version of *North by Northwest*, his finest thriller. He could not compete with the Bond films and after this he was increasingly obliged to make small-budget films.¹²⁶

Truffaut was an ambivalent character and despite his zealous iconoclasm and vitriolic attacks, he often contradicted his critical positions, sometimes supporting films which his principles should have led him to condemn (for example Claude Autant-Lara's *La Traversée de Paris* (*Four Bags Full*, 1956) and *En Cas de Malheur* (*Love is my Profession*, 1958), and in particular Henri-Georges Clouzot,

¹²⁵ François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, above cited, 11.

¹²⁶ In Anne Guillaín (ed.), *Le cinéma selon François Truffaut* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 430-1.

a director who he had represented as the nemesis of the *politique des auteurs*, in one of those complete "u-turns and return to the humiliated fathers which would soon become Truffaut classics".¹²⁷

As soon as his first feature was completed, Truffaut was able to declare, "I have become more indulgent - that is to say, I have lost all intention of reforming cinema [...] I only want to make good films".¹²⁸ Thus the same person who equated cinema with *mise-en-scène* and visual expression said in an interview in 1970 that during the shooting of *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), he had realised how "dialogue was more important in a film than I had realised. It is in fact, the most important thing".¹²⁹ Truffaut's own style had fast given way to films much more within the tradition he had attacked as a critic. *La Nuit américaine* (*Day for Night*, 1973), Truffaut's panegyric on the cinema about the making of a film entitled "*Je vous présente Paméla*", as Diana Holmes and Robert Ingram, have observed,

Undermines the idea of the *auteur* as the artist who writes their vision of the world on the film. The emphasis rather falls on the collective nature of the production process, the determining effect of material constraints and the contribution of chance to the final product.¹³⁰

The subtext of the film is the death of classical cinema and the work of Ferrand, the director of the film within the film played by Truffaut, is mostly reduced to that of scriptwriting and, rather surprisingly, from the author of "A Certain

¹²⁷ Noël Herpe, "Clouzot Henri-Georges", in Antoine de Baecque and Arnaud Guigue (eds.), *Le Dictionnaire Truffaut* (Paris: Éditions de la Martinière, 2004), 102.

¹²⁸ Truffaut in Annette Insdorf, *François Truffaut, Revised and Updated Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 36.

¹²⁹ Truffaut, in Insdorf, above cited, *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Diana Holmes and Robert Ingram, *François Truffaut* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 177.

Tendency of the French Cinema“, "*Je vous présente Pamela*" is represented as a banal bourgeois psychological melodrama. As Jean-Michel Frodon has noted,

This idea of cinema in general in the film, is, although the film does not mention it, a polemical stance against his previous critical theses [...] the film could perfectly be set in the 1940s or 1950s. The nostalgic signalling of the end of an era that had been dominated by stars, studios and scripts.¹³¹

As Truffaut himself would later admit, "because of a taste for exoticism, a taste for novelty, romanticism, evidently also because of a delight in contradiction, but surely through love of vitality, we decided to love everything as long as it was from Hollywood".¹³² Yet at the height of the vicious onslaught against British cinema he could still write an article in defence of Peter Glenville's *The Prisoner* (1955), featuring Alec Guinness in the role of a Cardinal who is persecuted by an inquisitor played by Jack Hawkins:

Peter Glenville's film deserved better than this bad reception. No doubt, this is a theatrical play since most of the action takes place in one room where the prelate and his (moral) executioner confront one another. All this is very honestly said and done, so much so that one awaits with curiosity Peter Glenville's second film.¹³³

Truffaut became a central figure of the filmmaking establishment he had so bitterly criticised. As a member of the Cannes film festival jury in 1962 (from which he had been briefly banned for being so vituperative against the Tradition of Quality), he insisted that the British actress Rita Tushingham should get the acting

¹³¹ Jean-Michel Frodon, *L'Age moderne du cinéma français* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), 391-2.

¹³² Truffaut in Innsdorf, above cited, 22

¹³³ François Truffaut (signed Robert Lachenay), "*L'emprisonné*", *Arts*, 1955, Truffaut Collection, Fonds François Truffaut, Bibliothèque du Film.

prize for her role in *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961).¹³⁴ Yet he also viciously dismissed what he saw as the excessively realistic acting style of English actors in a xenophobic aside whilst directing *Fahrenheit 451* starring British actress Julie Christie:

When I asked for actors who didn't have a British appearance, I was asked: 'What is a British appearance?' I was tempted to reply: 'It's when you have a crooked face.' In fact it is true: the English have all got crooked, asymmetrical faces, whereas in Hollywood they all have symmetrical faces; they go to Hollywood because of that, because the two sides are the same. The only Englishman who is successful in Hollywood is Cary Grant. As soon as an Englishman becomes idealised, stylised, he leaves for Hollywood. Therefore, in London the only ones left are the realists. All their lives they will have Peter Finch. This English phenomenon is very curious; you could go on talking about it for ages.¹³⁵

In 1966, Truffaut, who in the 1950s did not hesitate to write that "British cinema was dead", came to shoot his only English film, *Fahrenheit 451*, in a country "whose national cinema" he had by his own admission "as a journalist dragged through the mud so often".¹³⁶ Confronted with the fact that he had come to Britain after having demolished British cinema in the press by a journalist from *Midi-Minuit fantastique*, Truffaut replied, "I nearly wish I had never written that".¹³⁷ Made in the same year as the publication of the Hitchcock book, *Fahrenheit 451* was shot at Pinewood studios with Nicholas Roeg as director of photography. In his Journal, published in *Cahiers du cinéma* between 10 January and 21 June

¹³⁴ Truffaut, *Letters* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), 216.

¹³⁵ François Truffaut in Anne Gillain (ed.), *Le cinéma selon François Truffaut* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 178

¹³⁶ François Truffaut, "Journal du tournage de *Fahrenheit 451*" (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque des Cahiers du cinéma, 2000), 127.

¹³⁷ Stacy Waddy, "Visite à François Truffaut", *Midi-Minuit fantastique*, 15-16, December 1966-67, 38.

1966, Truffaut described how he virtually spent the entire period in London, when not actually at Pinewood, in the Hilton hotel or at the National Film Theatre. Realising that he had begun "to shoot an English film", Truffaut was terrified that his film would somewhat be transformed by what he called "national characteristics". Yet his diary, that had started with a mistrust of the "Other", ends in love, contradicting the quote opening this chapter. On 9 March 1966, Truffaut noted, "I am becoming very anglophile, if not anglophone."¹³⁸

Truffaut had a famous mental block with the English language. As Anne Guillain has suggested, for Truffaut, "English, perhaps because he could never speak it, was the language of desire".¹³⁹ Yet, paradoxically, as Marie Anne Guerin has noted, Truffaut is one of the French directors who has shot the most films in English-language; *Fahrenheit 451*, *Les Deux Anglaises et le continent* (*Two English Girls*, 1971) and *L'Histoire d'Adèle H* (*The Story of Adèle H.*, 1975, shot in double version). For Guerin, in Truffaut's films,

to express oneself in English corresponds to the summit of femininity, hence it is a sign of social superiority. The *bourgeoises* (Fabienne Tabard in *Baisés Volés*, *Stolen Kisses*, 1968), the bohemians (Catherine in *Jules et Jim*, 1961), the aristocrats of love (*Adèle H.*), all know English.

Finally, according to Guerin:

One can understand, in this context, that the director faces too many inhibitions towards this language and thus has to compensate by over proudly protecting himself from this so-called incapacity, this dread, by

¹³⁸ François Truffaut: *La Nuit américaine suivi du journal du tournage de Fahrenheit 451*, originally published in *Cahiers du cinéma* between January and June 1966, (Paris: Petite bibliothèque des Cahiers du cinéma, 2000), 151.

¹³⁹ Anne Gillain, *François Truffaut Le Secret perdu* (Paris: Hatier, 1991), 132.

affecting a retreat, a withdrawal, an awkwardness and a reluctance about identity. Truffaut's filmography is obsessed by the fantasmatic power and the particular glamour of English women, masters of language who are somewhat slightly awkward physically. Their beauty possesses a kind of immodesty and masculinity. They have neither the feminine grace nor the lightness of the French. They are full-blown subjects, if not more.¹⁴⁰

Truffaut's formulations and statements tend to cancel each other out but what is remarkable in the negative configuration of British cinema by Truffaut (and others such as Jean-Luc Godard) is the comparison with the English literary canon. As Jefferson Kline has noted, Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*, "is in some way a metaphor for the whole of post-war French cinema's relationship to books: banned by decree, they remained cherished, embedded firmly in the minds of the principal players of the unfolding drama".¹⁴¹ Perhaps in Truffaut, English women, these "masters of language", are an invisible symptom of the return of the "Other", of an ambivalent double movement away from and toward the object of desire.

Conclusion

The path adopted by *Cahiers du cinéma* critics was taken up by cinephiles in the United States, most notably by the influential American critic Andrew Sarris and the British Robin Wood, although it has to be borne in mind that Truffaut had a particular agenda of his own. After the advent of the New Wave, the idea of

¹⁴⁰ Marie Anne Guerin, "Anglais", in Antoine de Baecque and Arnaud Guigne (eds.), *Le dictionnaire Truffaut* (Paris: Editions de la Martinière, 2004), 20.

¹⁴¹ Jefferson Kline, *Screening the Text, Intertextuality in New Wave French Cinema* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 4.

installing the *auteur* as a criterion of value was placed firmly on the agenda on French film criticism and history, a legacy that remains dominant even today. The critical texts of post-war French cinephilia also had a considerable impact upon the foundation of academic film study and published criticism across America, Britain and Europe during the 1960s.

The short period under scrutiny in this chapter was a decisive moment in the affirmation of new methods of criticism and the ensuing establishment of a new canon. During the early 60s, auteurism and the interpretation of *mise en scene* became as David Bordwell has noted, “in several variants, the dominant form of serious writing on the cinema with the *Cahiers* critics providing a central impetus for this cinephilia”.¹⁴² Another fundamental contribution of *Cahiers du cinéma* to film history was that the emergence of auteurism fuelled the institutionalisation in the mid-60s of cinema studies as an academic discipline in the context of literature where interpretative criticism or what Bordwell calls the “transmission model” was led by an “*artist-entered* conception of meaning”¹⁴³, whilst in film schools the idea of the director as auteur influenced whole generations of directors, in Western Europe and elsewhere.

Because it has been regarded as the outcome of the national film culture that developed in the post-war period with the flourishing of a learned cinephilia fed

¹⁴² David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1997), 81.

¹⁴³ David Bordwell, *Making Meaning, Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1991), 53, 65, emphasis in text.

by the cine-club movement, the French New Wave has assumed prominence in French film history. It is often defined by critics and historians as the last flourishing in the history of the elevation of cinema from a vulgar fairground attraction to a fully-fledged art form and the critical standard against which French cinema has been judged ever since. The French New Wave still exerts an enormous amount of fascination; in his recent biography of Jean-Luc Godard, Colin MacCabe cites *Cahiers du cinéma* as "the most significant journal of the twentieth-century" and Truffaut's "*Une certaine tendance du cinéma français*" as "arguably the most important article in the history of French cinema".¹⁴⁴

The re-evaluation of Hollywood cinema, enhanced by the French intellectual fascination, had for the most part an extremely negative effect on the critical standing of British cinema in its native country. Auteurist critics, who, following Truffaut and the New Wave, mainly concerned themselves with auteurism and upheld Hollywood as a standard of value, implicitly concurred with Truffaut's assertions. Truffaut's ideas made a great impact and had important implications at the level of both basic information and critical writing on British cinema. By the time the controversy around American cinema came to dominate critical attention in Britain, *Cahiers* critics by now directors, were possessed of immense prestige, for their stylistic and thematic innovations, as for their international success. As their ideas were "dismissed as extremist, intellectually pretentious or just plain

¹⁴⁴ Colin MacCabe, *Jean-Luc Godard: a Portrait of the Artist at 70* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 67, 85.

nutty by the Anglo-Saxon critical establishment of the time", Jim Hillier has noted that in Britain they nevertheless found a receptive ear in "those enervated by English empiricism and 'good' taste".¹⁴⁵ The French influence was mostly felt in *Movie*, which grew out of Oxford Opinion, first published in 1962 under the editorship of Mark Shivas, Paul Mayersberg and V. F. Perkins where, in line with the editorial policy of *Cahiers du cinéma*, while Hitchcock and Hawks were ranked as great auteurs, British cinema was deemed to be "as dead as before. Perhaps it was never alive".¹⁴⁶ This highly skewed view was followed up in 1963 by Peter Graham's pamphlet called *The Abortive Renaissance* with the revealing subtitle "Why are Good British Films So Bad?".¹⁴⁷ In the 1960s, as Charles Barr has recently recalled, "under the influence of *Cahiers du cinéma*", a generation of young British critics:

Discovered the richness of Hollywood cinema, past and present, and of its *auteurs* [...] we had a tendency to adopt their attitude: we would start to imitate them in many ways but we were not interested in British cinema, it was not to our taste.¹⁴⁸

As a result of the dominant role French film critics have played in canonisation, as Ian Christie has noted, French critics' views, and in particular those of Truffaut, have been crucial in fashioning public images of British cinema.¹⁴⁹ Although

¹⁴⁵ Jim Hillier, above cited, 223.

¹⁴⁶ V.F. Perkins, "The British cinema", *Movie*, 1, 1962, 3.

¹⁴⁷ Peter Graham, *The Abortive Renaissance* (London: Axle Publication, 1963).

¹⁴⁸ Charles Barr, "Une histoire personnelle Typiquement British", in N.T. Binh and Philippe Pilard (eds.), *Typiquement British, Le cinéma britannique* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2000), 18.

¹⁴⁹ Ian Christie, "Mirror images: French Reflections of British Cinema", *La Lettre de la Maison Française d'Oxford*, 11, Trinity-Michaelmas 1999, 83.

Raymond Durgnat's *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence*, published in 1970, has been retroactively considered as paving the way for the rediscovery of British cinema, in the field of film theory all eyes were on Hollywood or independent works while mainstream British cinema suffered from attacks by native scholars or commentators, in a process that Charles Barr has described as "cultural self-laceration":

This critical work has had consistently a greater prestige internationally than British cinema itself, and the very prestige of this tradition has, with a certain irony, helped to keep the prestige of British films at a low level, as a result of the consistent way in which the most progressive and interesting elements of this criticism have - at least until recently - been actively hostile or at best indifferent, to the work of a commercial mainstream of the British cinema.¹⁵⁰

British critics who wrote influential books or essays have usually drawn upon American rather than British films. So for example, when Robin Wood wrote what is considered a groundbreaking study of Alfred Hitchcock, he focused on the director's American period.¹⁵¹ In Truffaut's *La Nuit américaine* (*Day for Night*, 1973) where the director Ferrand, played by Truffaut himself, receives a package of monographs paying homage to directors, Robin Wood's *Hitchcock* book features prominently; Wood also contributed to the 1960 issue of *Cahiers du cinéma* on *Psycho*, where Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*, as we will see in the next chapter, was the object of a biting review. Only in the 80s would the revival of interest in British cinema begin to gather momentum with the rediscovery of an

¹⁵⁰ Charles Barr, *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), 7.

¹⁵¹ Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films* (London and New York: A. Zwemmer/A.S. Barnes, 1965).

“unmapped British cinema“.¹⁵²

Finally, if the transnational influence of the criticism associated with *Cahiers du cinéma* was due, partly, to the subsequent evolution of many of its critics into the directors of the New Wave, it was also a result of the central place of its editor André Bazin in the history of film theory.

In France, film history followed Truffaut in the process of smoothing over his contradictions and shifting values. A core section of French cinephilia is still hostile to British films. The enduring myth that the British have no film culture has been perpetuated in particular by Jean-Luc Godard in his monumental *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1998): "The English have done what they always do in the cinema: nothing"¹⁵³, while the film historian and lately *Cahiers du cinéma* editor Jean-Michel Frodon has also added to this explicitly nationalist approach to cinema history by claiming that "there have been some English films, some very good ones, but until now there has been no English cinema".¹⁵⁴

This speaks of the continuously high cultural currency of Truffaut's formulation in dominant critical discourse and cinephile-orientated historiography and the Godard worship has reinforced this tendency. One important aspect of the canonisation of Godard's monumental work, however, is the problem of which or whose film history Godard's cinematic work represents, displays and whose idea

¹⁵² Julian Petley, "The Lost Continent", in Charles Barr, above cited, 98-119.

¹⁵³ Jean-Luc Godard, "La monnaie de l'absolu", *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, 3 A (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 83.

¹⁵⁴ Jean-Michel Frodon, *La Projection nationale: cinéma et nation* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1998), 143.

of cinema does it advance and what value and meaning does it define? Indeed, as Ginette Vincendeau has suggested of recent Godard scholarship, what is left out, marginalized or repressed in Godard's account has not been addressed:

No one apparently stops to ask basic questions such as "what does *Histoire(s) du cinéma* tell us about the history of cinema?" let alone - amazingly, given the canonical nature of Godard's pantheon (Hitchcock, Renoir, Lang, Rossellini) - What does it leave out?¹⁵⁵

Gilbert Adair has argued that "the history of British cinema is that of an inferiority complex"¹⁵⁶ and complained that "British film criticism of its own national cinema has tended to be narrowly sociological in tone".¹⁵⁷ Peter Wollen has also suggested that the long-lasting disinterest in British cinema was, in part, a consequence and a reflection of "the inadequate degree of attention that has been paid to writing the history of British film with an aesthetic dimension"¹⁵⁸, while for Pierre Sorlin, writing in 1980, one of the main differences between French and British film cultures is that while "the English like to understand *what* films say, what they communicate; the French are more interested in how they say it, and how they can be understood".¹⁵⁹ Lastly according to Paul Willemen,

In British cultures, the selection of cinema as an object of study has never been associated with cinephilia. In other words, the desire for cinema has never been accepted as a sufficient reason. Those who manifestly did show signs of such a desire have been forced to find alibis in order to be allowed to practice it in public [...] In Britain compliance with the social demands to

¹⁵⁵ Ginette Vincendeau, "In Praise of Love", *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 15, Issue 2, February 2005, 38.

¹⁵⁶ Gibert Adair, "The British Tradition", in Gilbert Adair and Nick Roddick (eds.), *A Night at the Pictures* (London: Columbus Books, 1985), 14.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*, 16.

¹⁵⁸ Peter Wollen, "The Canon", in *Paris-Hollywood: Writings on Film* (London: Verso, 2003), 221.

¹⁵⁹ Pierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), viii

cover up the manifestations of desire for cinema has been the rule for nearly a century.¹⁶⁰

This is the opposite of the French tradition of film criticism, which has been marked, certainly more acutely since the advent of the French New Wave, by what Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier have called "*le mur du formalisme*".¹⁶¹ Importantly, whereas both French and British scholars have focused their attention on *Cahiers du cinéma* and the New Wave, they have tended either to ignore other French critical approaches or to pay them only passing mention so that other traditions and alternative views of British cinema in France have been largely ignored or even occluded. Thus there has been little or no place for *Positif* or *Midi-Minuit fantastique* in most standard histories of French cinephilia and criticism, although a partial exception to this was Peter Graham's *The French New Wave*, which at least paid some attention to *Positif* and included their position in relation to the French New Wave and *Cahiers du cinéma*. Yet, even at the time of Truffaut's pronouncements in the early 1960s, there was evidence of a significant interest in British cinema; British films which a decade earlier had been ostracized, now became the object of a cult and a distinctive positive discourse was forged. It is to this pivotal moment in the history of the relationship between French critics and British cinema that we now turn.

¹⁶⁰ Paul Willemsen, *Looks and Frictions, Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 223.

¹⁶¹ Burch and Sellier, *La drôle de guerre des sexes du cinéma français, 1930-1946*, (Paris: Editions Nathan, 1996), 309.

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COMMANDO DANS LA GIRONDE

1956, Deloben

(José FERRER)

Tous les films sont bons en ce moment, excepté ceux qui nous viennent d'Angleterre : *Drôle de nuit de noces*, *Fièvre blonde*, *Qui perd gagne* sont les pires. *Commando dans la Gironde* est mis en scène par l'acteur José Ferrer, qui doit estimer qu'on ne le filme jamais d'assez près puisqu'il s'offre ici outre un rôle excessivement avantageux, des gros plans inexpressifs et qui frisent l'indécence.

C'est Nino Frank, je crois, qui faisait un jour la remarque que l'humour anglais sera toujours suspect tant qu'il se gardera de prendre pour cible la Famille Royale. C'est en effet ce qu'il y a de réfrigérant dans l'humour

anglais que cette mesure, ce dosage prudent, cette limite qui ne va pas sans quelque hypocrisie.

Le rire est subversif ; le gag fait du spectateur un rieur subversif ; lorsque je vois un film anglais, j'ai toujours envie de rire à partir du moment où cela de vient émouvant.

M'horripile également la discrétion anglaise devant la douleur : « regardez-nous ; nous ne pleurons pas, notre émotion est intérieure ; nous sommes grands. » Voilà comment se termine chaque scène de *Commando dans la Gironde*, lorsqu'un soldat meurt sous nos yeux après avoir fait le pitre tant bien que mal depuis le début.

Derrière cet humour national, ce flegme de bazar, se dessine le canevas du film toujours le même : « ce bourru, cette baderne impitoyable qui pouvait vous paraître, mesdames et messieurs, bien souvent ridicule et inhumain, était en réalité un chef loyal et dur, exigeant avec les autres mais avec lui également, un vrai chef, un grand soldat anglais. »

Telle est la morale de cette pénible fresque héroïco-comique à base d'humanité et de courage exemplaire. Par ailleurs, José Ferrer n'est pas un bon metteur en scène ni *Commando dans la Gironde* un bon film.

François TRUFFAUT

PIÈGE POUR UNE CANAILLE

de Ken HUGUES

Les pièges se suivent et ne se ressemblent pas ; celui-ci est un piège à pigeons, plus bête que canaille mais à éviter absolument.

La décadence du cinéma anglais est devenue proverbiale ; il n'y a plus, après l'abîme que l'abîme et après un film anglais qu'à tirer les rideaux. Bonsoir !

Piège pour une canaille (*Confession*) offre ceci d'amusant qu'il constitue à ma connaissance, le premier démarquage systématique et continu d'un film de Hitchcock et même de plusieurs, et ce depuis le scénario jusqu'aux cadra-

ges ! Le prêtre qui, ayant reçu la confession d'un criminel, se trouve lié par le secret, dans l'impossibilité d'assister la justice, cela vous rappelle quoi ? *I confess*

bien sûr ! Et cette jeune fille qui comprend peu à peu que son frère est un assassin, n'est-elle point la réplique exacte de la Charlie de *L'Ombre d'un doute* ; même situation, même dialogue ; oui, petite sœur, je suis un assassin mais si papa l'apprenait, il en mourrait n'est-ce pas ?

Et l'inspecteur qui courtise la parente du criminel présumé à des fins professionnelles d'abord, amoureuses ensuite, les deux à la fois finalement, cela aussi vient tout droit de *L'Ombre d'un doute*.

Et l'héroïne qui veut sauter de la voiture en marche, retenue de justesse par le conducteur : voilà *Soupons* !

Toute l'œuvre américaine d'Alfred Hitchcock, défile ici, admirée sans aucun doute mais mal comprise, non digérée, caricatu-

rée en somme tout au long de cette sinistre bande.

Et si le gros et jovial « maître du suspense » se faisait projeter *Piège pour une canaille*, je l'imagine plié en deux, se tortillant de rire en voyant les échanges de regards, les dialogues dos à dos, les gros plans cadrés de côté, les rapides petits « travellings avant », autant de « trucs », qu'il est le seul capable de maîtriser, d'orchestrer et de contrôler infailliblement. La caractéristique d'un film de Hitchcock, étant justement cette infaillibilité qu'aucun effet jamais ne rate son but, il est cocasse de voir ici l'opération inverse : pas un plan réussi, pas un qui fasse mouche ! *Piège pour une canaille* fait la preuve par l'œuf du génie d'Alfred Hitchcock.

F. T.

L'EMPRISONNÉ

de Peter GRENVILLE

L'EMPRISONNÉ est paraît-il le premier film de Peter Grenville jeune cinéaste anglais plus ambitieux dit-on que ses collègues. L'astuce qui consiste à prendre Alec Guinness pour lui faire jouer très sérieusement le rôle d'un cardinal — qui ressemble comme un frère au primat de Hongrie le cardinal Mindszenty — se retourne contre le film, du moins aux Champs-Élysées puisque *L'Emprisonné* n'y est resté à l'affiche qu'une semaine.

Le film de Grenville méritait mieux que ce mauvais accueil.

Sans doute s'agit-il d'une pièce de théâtre puisque l'essentiel de l'action se déroule dans une

seule pièce où s'affrontent le prélat et son bourreau (moral) Jack Hawkins.

Tout cela se passe dans un pays imaginaire que tout un chacun peut situer aisément sur la carte.

Le bourreau et sa victime furent amis d'enfance, chacun suivit sa route, divergente on s'en doute.

Le cardinal, évidemment n'a pas comploté contre l'Etat mais nous sommes au temps de l'inquisition à l'envers et les persécutions religieuses commencent.

De cette lutte, et contre toute attente, le bourreau sort vainqueur et le cardinal, publiquement fait son autocritique :

« Oui, je suis un traître, oui j'ai comploté, etc. »

C'est ici que le film s'engage dans un sens unique qui n'est guère celui de l'Histoire : le cardinal ayant « avoué » son infamie, le dessein des juges est révisé : déconsidérer le prélat aux yeux de la chrétienté.

C'est pourquoi on le laissera libre et que c'est au milieu de l'hostilité muette de la foule qu'il déambulera dans la grisaille d'un matin d'hiver.

Tout cela est fort honnêtement dit, fort honnêtement fait, à tel point que l'on attend avec curiosité le second film de Peter Grenville.

Robert LACHENAY.

Arts n° 565-204 au 1/10/56

Arts n° 545, Novembre 1955

Vacances à Venise de David Lean

Une Américaine entre deux âges vient passer ses vacances à Venise; à peine arrivée, elle demande un taxi (sic) puis un autobus (ouais). C'est Katharine Hepburn, elle est seule dans la vie mais sur le tard le chiffre deux l'obsède; si elle rentre chez un antiquaire, séduite par un verre de cristal dans la vitrine, elle réclame aussitôt la paire mais c'est l'antiquaire qui s'offre, il est père mais se garde bien de lui dire. Katharine a séduit un bambino vénitien qui mendigote auprès des touristes. Avec l'antiquaire, celle marche plutôt mal: elle veut bien, elle ne veut plus, va-t-en, reviens, pourquoi? Elle est toute crispation, toute dérobage, craintive comme un fraîche épousée mais puritaine et méfiante au-delà qu'il est permis.

Bref, l'antiquaire italien qui n'est d'autre que Rossano Brazzi, "enlève l'affaire" un beau soir et c'est pleurnichante mais relaxée, défoulée et décomplexée que notre Américaine quittera Venise sans avoir vu les Giorgione.

La "Presse du coeur" presse les coeurs féminins comme des éponges et plutôt qu'un film, *Vacances à Venise* est une confidence en lacrymoscope.

Un film bête rend tout bête autour de soi: les éclairages roses qui bordent l'écran, les actualités, les photos punaisées au mur "de travers" pour "faire bien", les esquimaux glacés et même le public. Ne vous avisez pas de courtoiser votre voisine pendant *Vacances à Venise*. Dans ces moments-là, les femmes se sentent immatérielles, elles ont des âmes et rien de moins!

Film anglo-italo-américain, *Vacances à Venise* est moins mièvre et moins fade qu'on ne pourrait s'y attendre, soit que David Lean y ait mis un peu de sincérité, soit au contraire que, voulant avec cynisme réaliser une bonne affaire, il se soit trompé dans le dosage. En tout cas il n'a pas oublié que de tous ses films *Brève rencontre* fut le plus commercial, aussi en utilise-t-il de nouveau la recette ferroviaire, mais privé de Noël Coward, David Lean plus souvent qu'à son tour, se prend dans la construction du scénario.

Et comme tout cela a vieilli, l'idylle impossible après la brève rencontre d'un homme et d'une femme d'âge, de physique, de standing et de niveau moyens, puisqu'au cinéma faire le jeu de la moyenne revient à faire celui de la majorité! Katharine Hepburn, seule avec celui qu'elle aime sans espoir, se détourne pour pleurer, les tendres explications sont interrompues par l'arrivée de l'éternel couple de casse-pieds, tout cela est vieux, démodé, suranné, vraiment trop "facile" et jette retrospectivement un doute sur la valeur de *Brève rencontre* qui, pour émouvoir, tirait sur les mêmes ficelles. *Vacances à Venise* n'est pas une entreprise spécifiquement condamnable mais un film vain, inutile, d'une esthétique flatteuse et retardataire, un film, qui, à sa manière, fait reculer le cinéma de dix ans

François Truffaut, *Arts*, 542, November 1955.

Trois meurtres [The Stranger Left No Card]

Aucune critique n'ose, une fois pour toutes, régler son compte au cinéma anglais. Simplement, "on" ne va plus le voir. Dire que le cinéma anglais est mort serait excessif puisque simplement il n'a jamais existé. Quelques brillantes exceptions confirment la règle: Hitchcock, Laurence Olivier, Thorold Dickinson et peut-être Carole Reed. Le film anglais actuel est un produit incolore, inodore et sans saveur particulière. Dans neuf sur dix des cas il s'inspire du René Clair de *La beauté du Diable* ou des *Belles de nuit*.

Jamais de celui du *Quatorze juillet*. La platitude et la fadeur sont ses deux mamelles. Le film anglais - soyons juste - présente des avantages: on s'y ennue tellement, on participe si peu à l'action, que l'on peut bavarder avec sa voisine sans que les spectateurs n'y trouvent à redire, aussi, "Le Marbeuf" est-il devenu le dernier salon où l'on cause. La photo du film anglais est si égale en sa blancheur que l'écran réfléchit dans la salle une lumière suffisante pour écrire sa correspondance, ou - si l'on est journaliste - son papier [...]

L'idée n'est jamais venue à des cinéastes anglais que *l'originalité* - puisque aussi bien est-ce là leur objectif, réside plus souvent dans le traitement d'un sujet - tant du point de vue du scénario que dans la mise en scène - que dans la nature même de ce sujet. Pour s'attaquer au fantastique, il faut avoir les reins plus solides et surtout trouver un *style*. Le style est ce qui manque le plus au cinéma anglais. Il est curieux par exemple que les plus mauvais films policiers nous viennent du pays d'Agatha Christie! [...]

Les meilleurs films anglais étant moins biens mis en scène qu'un film français ou américain de dernière zone, il faut bien supposer qu'il existe un sixième sens - celui du cinéma - et que les anglais ne le possèdent point. Je doute que les trois réalisateurs de *Trois crimes* aient des idées bien précises sur l'angle et la durée d'un plan, sur tel genre de photo ou tel autre sur la façon de diriger un acteur [...]

François Truffaut, *Arts*, March 1955

Chapter Three:

The Creation of an Alternative Canon: *Positif*, *Midi-Minuit fantastique*, British Horror and the *Fantastique*.

At a time when the cinema currently in favour addresses itself exclusively to the intellect for admiration, it may seem beside the point to talk of the pleasure one feels in watching *Peeping Tom*. The extreme sophistication exercised by our modern filmmakers in ringing the changes on their love play never cuts to the heart of the matter. In bed their characters behave like you and me. One likes occasionally to turn to other horizons, where dawns a more fantastic conception of eroticism.¹

Horror has become in Great-Britain, a new and clearly defined cinematic genre with its own rules and style. There is much talk now of Free Cinema. However, by its power of suggestion, its frenzy, its invitation to journey towards the land of black marvels and erotic fantasy, isn't the English horror film the true Free Cinema?²

¹ Jean-Paul Török, "Look at the Sea: *Le Voyeur*", *Positif*, 36, November 1960, 59.

² Jean-Paul Török, "H Pictures" (II), *Positif*, 40, July 1961, 41.

The last chapter documented the hostile reception that had greeted British films in writings by prominent *Cahiers du cinéma* critics and how, with the regime of the *politique des auteurs*, Alfred Hitchcock was established as the exception that proved the rule in British cinema and the figure against which it was contrasted. As already noted, this was typical of a judgment of taste and a critical tool which has informed negative readings of British cinema for many years and continues to exert its influence to this day. This critical line, combining the *politique des auteurs* with an approach to cinema as a religious narrative of the real had created a pantheon of films where the good object was the *auteur* whilst, even more than the conventional mainstream cinema, the "bad" object of this schema was the precise anchorage of films in every day life and in their social milieu.

Not all critics, however, had contempt for British cinema. As this chapter will document, whilst *Cahiers du cinéma* triumphed with the permanent elevation of Alfred Hitchcock into the pantheon and British films were routinely vilified, an equally polemical body of critical writings existed which engaged positively with British films but has been less documented. As the remarks quoted above indicate, through magazines such as *Positif* and *Midi-Minuit fantastique*, there was a strong interest in British cinema, especially in films representative of its "fantastic" elements. Contemptuous dismissal thus co-existed with a cult and militant engagement.

This interest in British cinema was in part a result of the aesthetic and ideological struggles and competing visions of cinema that had marked French film culture throughout the post-war period. In the 1960s, various critical currents and factions distanced themselves from the dominant cultural model

and the system of reference established by *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s but the enthusiasm for British film also developed out of a series of economic and intellectual developments such as the emergence of new circuits of exhibition and distribution and the creation of new film journals in which an alternative conception of cinema was expressed.

This chapter charts a key historical moment in the history of the critical reception of British cinema in France when across a decade, while British horror cinema was becoming the object of a cult, Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* was raised to a canonical status by a small section of French critics who led a campaign to have the film recognised in order to defend their idea of cinema as inherently "fantastic". The chapter traces the origins of this moment in the development of an alternative film culture in France in the 1950s and 1960s of which surrealism was a central component, in order to illustrate how the cult for British horror emerged as a result of conflicting trends within French cinephilia and as a reaction against the established regime of taste, illustrated by *Cahiers du cinéma*. In the process, this chapter explores the transitional value of *Peeping Tom* in the transformation of British cinema's reputation and argues that the rehabilitation of Michael Powell as an *auteur de film* should be seen as a key moment in the history of the reception of British cinema in France. I thus want to suggest that the overall context of this period paved the way for the critical recognition of British cinema, both in France and in Britain.

In the first part of this chapter, I will sketch out the legacy of surrealism and its familiar tropes such as the appeal to dreams, the fantastic, the marvelous and its role in the formation of a counter-culture of cinephile taste. I will then

move on to the revival of a critical trend infused by Surrealism in the post-war period as a central component of an alternative film culture, particularly as it developed in *Positif* and *Midi-Minuit fantastique* and gradually feeding into an emerging libertarian counter-culture of social and political engagement in the late 1960s.

In the second part, I examine how the cult and the legitimation of British horror in the early 60s was facilitated by the creation of selective film markets, which were defined by a sense of distinction from both the critical approach of *Cahiers du cinéma* and from mainstream film criticism. In the third section, before moving on specifically to a discussion of the positive reception of *Peeping Tom* in the early 1960s, I reflect upon the negative reception of British horror in mainstream criticism, considering in particular the reasons why horror was a disreputable genre in the first place with a case-study of the critical responses to *Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1958). I then move on to an examination of the formation of a cult around Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* and to the critical construction of the director as a key figure of the alternative pantheon which was being established in the 1960s as a challenge to the established regime of taste. In the concluding part, I will add to this reflection upon critical reputations with an analysis of the legacy of the *Positif* and *Midi-Minuit fantastique's* perspective on British cinema.

Before examining the overtly surrealist and Freudian quality of the French approach to horror and in order to understand the formation of a positive discourse on British cinema, we must first turn to the central role surrealism played in the development of a counter-canon and to the role of provocation as a strategy of cultural distinction. In addition, by examining the field of

surrealist film criticism, I hope to situate the cult reception of British horror and *Peeping Tom* as part of the surrealist taste for the imaginary and for a cinema modelled on oneiric activity.

The Surrealist Legacy

For a whole generation of intellectuals in late 1920s France, the cult of cinema, especially American, offered an alternative to mainstream "official" culture. As Alain and Odette Virmaux put it, the fascination with cinema was in a direct line from "the Decadent poets of the late nineteenth century; aesthetes and dandies such as Baudelaire, Lautréamont and Rimbaud, bent on glorifying what the establishment treated with contempt".³

For the Parisian avant-garde of the post-World War I era, the cinema was a new art form peculiarly in tune with the experience of modern life and it took centre place in the description of the "new spirit" of modern art by Guillaume Apollinaire, one of the most important figures of French intellectual life of the period after WWI:

L'esprit nouveau is first of all the enemy of aestheticism, formulas and snobbism [...] Poets want to be the first to give a new lyricism to those means of expression, cinema and the phonograph, which add movement to the arts.⁴

The word surrealism had been created by Apollinaire and André Breton in 1924, the year which marked the official birth of Surrealism, a literary and

³ Alain et Odette Virmaux, *Les Surréalistes et le cinéma* (Paris: Seghers, 1976), 13.

⁴ Guillaume Apollinaire, "L'Esprit nouveau et les poètes", *Mercure de France*, December 1918, quoted in Christophe Gauthier, "Les valeurs renversées: cinéma et modernité à la fin des années 20", *Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque*, 70, Octobre 1999, 70-71.

artistic avant-garde movement that attempted to link artistic experimentation with an ideological critique of bourgeois thought and a desire for social change based on the double exigency to "be absolutely modern" (Rimbaud) and to change the way we think about the world. From the time of its foundation in France, surrealism attempted to displace the Cartesian system of moral and intellectual values on which French and Western culture were based and presented the imagination as the central power of the human mind from which poetry would emerge and where the unexpected, the incongruous, the enigmatic would grow, the new world of surreality. Surrealism did not advocate so much a revolution as revolt against the established order and established literature and the total destruction of the bonds on human liberty imposed by country, family, religion, morality and rational thought. After the shock of the Great War, Breton had discovered Freud and undertaken to explore the creative possibilities of the unconscious against the established order. Surrealism proclaimed the omnipotence of desire, and the legitimacy of its realisation. "The true revolution", for the surrealists, according to Maurice Nadeau, "was the victory of desire".⁵ The surrealists considered the unconscious essential to their aesthetic and political project: freed from the censorship of logic, morality and aesthetics, the imagination could be released and unfettered desire would overturn the bourgeois world. The members of the surrealist movement were primarily writers, painters, and not filmmakers, but they extolled the potential of cinema in their quest for new modes of experience.

⁵ Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism* (Paris: Johnathan Cape, 1968), 190.

The idea that the peculiarity of cinema is that it belongs to the realm of the imaginary and inclines towards the marvelous was at the core of the surrealist interest in the cinema in the 1920s and the transformation of reality gradually became the defining nature of film. In his *Paris-journal* review column of 1923, Robert Desnos began to articulate an explicitly surrealist "theory" of cinema where he described the dialectic linking reality and the dream in film and the surrealist idea that cinema and poetry were engaged in the same task, the transformation of reality.⁶ Film presented a poetic language of images analogous to the state of dreaming and in watching film; the spectator was often reduced to a dream state: "Essentially", Antonin Artaud suggested,

The cinema reveals a whole occult life with which it puts us directly into contact [...] if the cinema was not made to express dreams or everything that in waking life has something in common with dreams, then it has no point.⁷

More importantly, argued Artaud, if the potential of the cinema was to be realised then it should

Bear a greater resemblance to the fantastic, that fantastic of which it is increasingly observed that it is the real in its entirety; otherwise, it doesn't exist.⁸

The poet Louis Aragon advanced the idea that cinema, as the "master of all distortion", had the power to transform reality through the close-up and could effect "the magnification of the kind of objects that, without artifice our mind

⁶ Robert Desnos, "Le Rêve et le cinéma", *Paris-Journal*, 27 April 1923, translated in Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism, Vol. 1, 1907-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 283-285.

⁷ Antonin Artaud, "Cinéma et réalité", *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 1 November 1927, in Abel, above cited, 410-412.

⁸ Antonin Artaud, *Sorcery and Cinema*, written circa 1928, translated in Paul Hammond (ed.), *The Shadow & Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2000), 104.

can raise to the superior life of poetry".⁹

In 1925, Jean Goudal wrote that the cinema constituted "*a conscious hallucination*".¹⁰ Goudal saw the experience of film as merging a conscious and unconscious state, bridging reality and imagination and thus exploring the absurd and irrational of everyday existence. As a dream site, the locus of cinema's power for the surrealists and the defining nature of film, lay in its close association with the play of the unconscious, bringing the latent content of dreams to the surface, making the unconscious visible. The nature of cinema's specificity was that it functioned as an approximation of unconscious desire and thus the fantastic, the eruption of what Freud has called the uncanny within the real, was positioned as central to the surrealist conception of cinema.

The cinema allowed the viewer to cultivate a sense of disorientation and in their attempt to disorient themselves through the cinema Breton and the surrealists would adopt radical movie-going practices. They would pop in and out of movie theatres, thus "calling attention to the imaginary nature of the medium"¹¹ and write lyrical articles about their experience, a critical practice which aimed at distilling the latent dream content of films. The first generation of surrealists intimated from the outset, as Margaret Bonnet has pointed out, that purely technical and aesthetic problems concerned them very little.¹² Surrealist writing on films was thus mainly celebratory and openly subjective;

⁹ Robert Desnos, "Du décor", translated in Hammond, above cited, 51.

¹⁰ Jean Goudal, "Surréalisme et cinéma", *La Revue hebdomadaire*, February 1925, translated in Abel, above cited, 357, emphasis in text.

¹¹ Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire* (Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 48.

¹² Marguerite Bonnet, "L'aube du surréalisme et le cinéma: attentes et rencontres", *Etudes cinématographiques*, 38-39, 1965, 90.

"bringing a film's latent content to the surface had priority and the Surrealist viewer deconstructed the film according to his or her light".¹³ The great importance the surrealists placed on subjective interpretation has made it thus possible to see in their writings on cinema an early theory of subjectivity, "questions that have recently been re-posed by semiotic and psychoanalytic theories of film in France."¹⁴

In the cinema, in the search for a pure poetic language of images, surrealism wanted to undermine the narrative nature of film. As Robert Aron argued in the "films of revolt" of Man Ray and Luis Buñuel, the spectator was condemned "to a far deeper sense of disorder" because of the director who "exercises his delight in dislocation and desire for freedom".¹⁵ Strictly speaking, there were only very few films that grew directly out of the surrealist movement and thus the project of advancing a marvelous, truly revolutionary cinema led the surrealists to champion a diverse corpus of films and to celebrate an already existent cinema.

The cinema became an intellectual stimulant and a prime source in the quest for surreality, especially in its potential to evoke the marvelous, "the crucible of surrealism" and a site untouched by moral conventions.¹⁶ In the Manifesto of 1924, Breton had termed the "marvelous" an art which, in its resolution of the seemingly contradictory states of dream and reality, conscious and unconscious, "produced a kind of absolute reality, or surreality".¹⁷ The

¹³ Hammond, above cited, 7-8.

¹⁴ Williams, above cited, 14.

¹⁵ Robert Aron, "Films de révolte", *La Revue du Cinéma*, November 1929, translated in Abel, above cited, 432-6.

¹⁶ Hammond, above cited, 3.

¹⁷ André Breton, "First Manifesto of Surrealism", 1924, in André Breton, above cited, 1969:

hallucinatory nature of cinema was taken up by Breton in his article "Comme dans un Bois", published in the surrealist film journal *L'Âge du cinéma* in 1951 where he argued that what had attracted the poet Jacques Vaché and him to the cinema was its power to disorient, "son pouvoir de dépaysement" as Breton described it recalling his personal film-going practices during the war: "I have never known anything so *magnetizing*".¹⁸

Through the disorientation the marvelous would be released and the beautiful thus displaced from "good taste" towards that which procures aesthetic pleasure.¹⁹ This was aroused, for Breton, by the sensation of the marvelous: "let's not mince words: the marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is beautiful".²⁰ Breton saw only a difference of degree between aesthetic and erotic pleasure, in part because of "a connection (though certainly not one of cause and effect) between the state of being in love and poetic 'furore'".²¹

The marvelous was fundamental to the surrealist attraction to the English Gothic tales of Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Gregory Lewis, Charles Maturin and Edward Young, known in France as the *romans noirs*. Following the Marquis de Sade, who had seen in these novels a product of the "revolutionary shock" reverberating around Europe, Breton had claimed Horace Walpole as a precursor of the surrealists and had stressed the oneiric nature of Gothic fiction which allowed the marvelous to be released, whilst interpreting the central tension of Gothic fiction in Freudian terms as the

14, emphasis in text.

¹⁸ André Breton, "Comme dans un bois", 1951, translated in Hammond, above cited, 72-78. emphasis in text.

¹⁹ Chenieux-Gendron, *Surrealism*, translated by Vivian Folkenflick (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 160.

²⁰ André Breton, First Manifesto of Surrealism, 1924, in Breton, 1969, 14.

²¹ Chenieux-Gendron, above cited, 19, 158.

embodiment of a struggle between Eros and Thanatos.²²

According to Hal Foster, the marvelous is the concept that superseded automatism as the basic principle of Breton surrealism and it is fundamental to the spiritualist aspect of surrealism, its attraction to mediumistic practices and gothic tales where the marvelous is again in play.²³ Breton had also mentioned Lewis's early Gothic horror *The Monk* (1796) in the first surrealist manifesto as embodying the "unforgettable intensity" of the marvelous where "there is no longer anything fantastic; there is only the real".²⁴ The castles covered in ivy of the gothic novels were also presented as the perfect surrealist decor and the surrealists were fascinated by their oneiric world. Tristan Todorov has based his definition of the fantastic on the hesitation and ambiguity that occur between reality and the inexplicable, much like the gap the surrealists sought to bridge between the everyday and secondary states.²⁵ According to Foster, concerned with taboo and transgression, the repressed and its return, gothic literature addressed the uncanny long before Freud.²⁶

The uncanny is where the familiar becomes fantastic and the shocking combination of revulsion and pleasure in the surrealist conception of the marvelous has a long history from gothic novels with their expression of erotic fantasy, violence, cruelty and dark romanticism. Freud's paradigm of the uncanny in literature was E.T.A. Hoffman's fantastic narrative *The Sandman* (1816-17). The uncanny, that which should have remained secret but has

²² André Breton, "English *romans noirs* and surrealism", 1937, translated in Victor Sage (ed.), *The Gothick Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 112-5.

²³ Al Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000), 19.

²⁴ André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism", in Breton above cited, 15.

²⁵ Tristan Todorov, *The Fantastic: a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, translated by Richard Howard (Cleveland: Press of Case Western University Press, 1973), 28-45.

²⁶ Hall Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, above cited, 230.

somehow failed to do so is "a term recurring time after time throughout 19C fantasy literature; it uncovers what is hidden and, by doing so, effects a disturbing transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar".²⁷ According to Hal Foster the marvelous is the uncanny, the site where "convulsive beauty [is] mixed with delight and dread, attraction and repulsion [...] and involves states (veiled-erotic and fixed explosive) that recall death or, more precisely, the inextricability of desire and death".²⁸ Thus as Paul Hammond has commented, in the cinema, "the surrealists went prospecting for [...] the sexual spot that heralded the return of the repressed".²⁹

The film of terror took on a special value for the surrealists, highlighting some of their fundamental preoccupations since in the horror film, monstrous forces cataclysmically dislocate the world of reason and as a result "the horror film often bears an oneiric, iconoclastic charge".³⁰ The fascination that the horror film exerted on the surrealists was due to its capacity to release a sense of the marvelous in which the juxtaposition of disparate elements achieved the poetic cohesion of a dream, acting as a passport between reality and the domain of desire. Thus for instance the surrealist Jean Levy celebrated *King Kong* for its oneiric quality and its monstrous eroticism, the uncanny quality, "l'inquiétante étrangeté" of its set and special effects as well as the absurdity of its plot.³¹ In conclusion, as J. H. Matthews has noted, "in its invitation to disregard reasonable reserve before the cinematic image and in its ability to

²⁷ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy, The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1998), 64-65.

²⁸ Foster, 2000, 28, 48.

²⁹ Hammond, 2000, 26

³⁰ Hammond, 2000, 38.

³¹ Jean Lévy, "King Kong", *Minotaure*, 3 (1934), translated in Hammond, above cited, 161-165.

hint at a mode of human existence normally concealed by everyday contact". the film of terror, "sets us on the road of appreciating the surrealist sense of the poetic in films".³²

The surrealist investment in the cinema was fundamentally different from that of the emerging cinephilia of the 1920s. The surrealists endorsed cinema in the name of a counter-culture and, in opposition to the recuperation of film as an art by intellectuals, they used provocation as a means to a reversal of values, opposing the status of art conferred on cinema by those critics such as Louis Delluc and Riccardo Canudo who attempted to legitimate cinema as the Seventh Art. Canudo was a French film writer who had coined the phrase "the seventh art", whilst Delluc was a key figure in promoting and conceiving of cinema as an art. In order to elevate the status of cinema, both Canudo and Delluc "proselytised the idea of the filmmaker as *auteur* or *écranist*" in a 1920s version which anticipated the *politique des auteurs*.³³ Delluc was also engaged in the avant-garde French "impressionist" school around Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein, Marcel L'Herbier and Abel Gance whose filmmaking practice was concerned with the expression of subjective experience using techniques such as slow motion, superimposition and natural locations. By contrast, the surrealists condemned both the formalist approach of pure or abstract cinema and the aesthetics of Impressionist cinema, objecting to its "exaggerated respect for art and a mystique of expression" as well as "its absence of human

³² J. H. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1971), 18.

³³ Abel, above cited, 74.

emotion".³⁴

The surrealists devised an alternative pantheon of film and declared their love for the involuntary poetry that emerges at random in the "worst movies", especially in those films that contained scenes of exacerbated violence and eroticism and subverted moral values. Films that were "involuntarily" surrealist and particularly lived up to the surrealist mission became the object of a cult, especially "*Fantômas*, for revolt and liberty, *Les Vampires*, for love and sensuality; *Les Mystères de New York*, for love and poetry".³⁵ Against the more refined cine-clubs of the 20s, where ideas about the relation of cinema to the other arts incubated under Impressionist critics, the surrealists favoured "fleapits" (*salles de quartiers*) that provided them with "a rapid turnover of films" and they delighted in the most "despised, wholly popular, almost anonymous trash".³⁶

The cultural identity of the surrealists hinged on a bohemian disdain for the bourgeois credo of reason and on an ethics of moral, aesthetic and social rebellion. As much a social provocation as an artistic movement, for the post-World War I generation, surrealism was a major form of radical and counter-cultural expression, defined in part by a cultural attitude, or more precisely a counter-cultural attitude which prided itself not only on its stance against good taste but also for being against the validity of the very notion of aesthetic taste, an anti-good taste attitude which it had inherited from Dada provocation. The

³⁴ Robert Desnos, "Avant-garde cinéma", Documents, December 1929, translated in Richard Abel, above cited, 1988, 429.

³⁵ Robert Desnos, "*Fantômas*, *Les Vampires*, *Les Mystères de New York*", *Le Soir*, 26 February 1927, translated in Richard Abel, above cited, 398-400.

³⁶ Hammond, above cited, 22.

engagement of the Surrealists with the cinema was thus expressive of their anti-establishment and anti-high cultural investment in French culture more generally. As Guy Gauthier has argued, the surrealists' hatred of literature, their taste for dreams and their exaltation of crime or of those films which illustrated criminal activities, were all elements

That aimed to transform cinema into a reprehensible activity, fed by the persistent concern to revive the mythified illegitimacy of the cinematograph in its early beginnings.³⁷

The subversion of values that the first generation of surrealists attempted against the Impressionist avant-garde in the 1920s in many way pre-dated the ideological and aesthetic polemics of the post-war period between *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif*. Although only representative of a minority of dissenting French intellectuals, the surrealist enthusiasm for the cinema during the 1920s helped to contribute to the development of French film aesthetics and film criticism and its impact would be pervasive in post-war French culture, especially in film criticism where it sought to affirm the value of films that stood apart, especially works of popular culture despised by the cultural establishment. In cinema, according to Dudley Andrew, surrealism so quickly attained cultural credit that even mainstream cinema felt repercussions from its incipient programme for the cinema whilst Peter Wollen has argued that auteurism itself cannot be understood "without some reference to the massive presence of Surrealism in French cultural history" as he argues that "there was a strong element of Surrealist fascination involved in the rediscovery of the

³⁷ Gauthier, above cited, 69.

Hollywood undergrowth".³⁸ Thus in the same way that *Cahiers du cinéma* went against the critical grain by seeking out "B" films for critical adulation, the neo-surrealist critics, in their preoccupation with cultural subversion, exalted the "worst" movies otherwise considered as aesthetically or morally objectionable. British horror would offer an exemplary model of this kind of cinema and the surrealist delight in exalting the most disreputable films would play an important role in *Peeping Tom* achieving cult status.

The Neo-Surrealists in the 1950s

The young generation of surrealist sympathisers that emerged in the post-war period took their inspiration from the first generation; hence, they were the proponents of a cinema modelled on oneiric activity and on the workings of the imaginary. Concurrently, they distinguished themselves from mainstream values and cinephile taste. Thus they both created an alternative canon of films and reactivated the radical cinema-going habits of the earlier generation. In 1958, surrealist film critic Ado Kyrou, who had published an anthology of the surrealist in the cinema in 1953, composed a book entitled *Manuel à l'usage du parfait petit spectateur*, a companion piece to his *Amour-érotisme et cinéma*.³⁹ This was both a treaty on how to behave in front of beloved films and a bible of civil disobedience directed against hated films. Kyrou advocated

³⁸ Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regrets, Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 43; Peter Wollen, *Readings and Writings, Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (London: NLB, 1982), 208, 209.

³⁹ Ado Kyrou, *Le surréalisme au cinéma* (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1953, 2nd ed., 1963), *Manuel du parfait petit spectateur* (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1958), *Amour-érotisme et cinéma* (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1957, 2nd ed., 1967).

various means of diversion in order to disrupt showings and to fight boredom (this principle of *détournement* would be appropriated by the Situationists during the 1960s).⁴⁰ According to Marc-Christian Bosseno, this radical spectator handbook neatly illustrates the paradoxical way in which cinephilia has historically constructed itself as a rebellious tribe:

The true amateur does not intend to be an ordinary spectator, but on the contrary aims to distinguish himself from the mass public, either by reviling established cinema or on the contrary by electing a despised production, current or *auteur*.⁴¹

Surrealist taste in the immediate post-war period was reviewed in *L'Âge du cinéma* (1951-1952), a film journal founded by Ado Kyrou, Robert Benayoun, Robert Legrand and Georges Goldfayn during the same year that *Cahiers du cinéma* was created. *L'Âge du cinéma* critics defined themselves both against mainstream film criticism, especially in its taste for realism (under the impact of Italian neo-realism) and against the notion of film as art as it was developing in *Cahiers du cinéma*. *L'Âge du cinéma* formulated a counter-canon of surrealist film at the centre of which were Luis Buñuel and Georges Méliès as representative of the essence of the Surrealist in the cinema. The disdain for the formal aspect of cinema and the idea that formalism was a regressive conception led the surrealists to "revise" film history and exalt the most commercial and popular genres. In the 1950s, the cinema the surrealist advocated was thus:

They can keep their Bressons and their Coctaus. The cinematic, modern

⁴⁰ See Laurent Chollet, *L'Insurrection situationiste* (Paris: Editions Dagorno, 2000) and on the Situationist International as a re-launching of Surrealism, see Peter Wollen, *Raiding the Icebox, Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

⁴¹ Christian-Marc Bosséno, "La place du spectateur", *Vingtième siècle, Revue d'histoire*, 46, April-June 1995, 153.

marvelous is popular, and the best and most exciting films, are beginning with Méliès and *Fantômas*, the films shown in local fleapits, films which seem to have no place in the history of the cinema.⁴²

Following Breton, Kyrrou saw in cinema the heir of the "frenetic" romanticism of the English Gothic novels and the decadent tradition of the Marquis de Sade and the Comte de Lautréamont.⁴³ These concerns fitted perfectly with developments in British cinema of the post-war period, when as Ian Christie has observed, "the Expressionist/Surrealist idiom would erupt within mainstream British commercial cinema" and the "Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger films of 1947-55 anticipated a neo-Romantic shift in British culture".⁴⁴ The alternative canon that developed within surrealist infused criticism saw in certain British films the qualities that they demanded of cinema more generally. In *L'Âge du cinéma* this early canon included *High Treason* (Maurice Elvey, 1928), *Queen of Spades* (Thorold Dickinson, 1949)⁴⁵, *Dead of Night* (Robert Hamer, Basil Dearden, Charles Crichton, Alberto Cavalcanti, 1945), *A Matter of Life and Death* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1946)⁴⁶, *Corridors of Mirrors* (Terence Young, 1949)⁴⁷, as well as any film featuring the actress Margaret Rutherford. The configuration of British cinema constructed in surrealist writings of this period would have a major impact in the next decade, when the evolution of this critical counter-

⁴² Ado Kyrrou, "The marvelous is popular", translated in Paul Hammond, above cited, 68-71.

⁴³ Ado Kyrrou, "Romantisme et cinéma. Pour un cinéma frénétique", *L'Âge du cinéma*, 1, March 1951, 2-6.

⁴⁴ Ian Christie, "The Odd Couple", in Ian Christie and Philip Dodd (eds.), *Spellbound: Art and Film*, (London: Hayward Gallery/British Film Institute, 1996), 48.

⁴⁵ Robert Benayoun, "Les morts diront leurs secrets ... A propos de *Queen of Spades*", *L'Âge du cinéma*, 1, March 1951.

⁴⁶ Robert Benayoun, "Propos sur l'onirisme cinématographique", *L'Âge du cinéma*, 2, May 1951, 3-6.

⁴⁷ Ado Kyrrou, "Romantisme et cinéma", *L'Âge du cinéma*, 1, March 1951, 2-6.

current in French criticism also coincided with the emergence of a flourishing horror genre.

The interest in horror was related to an increasing critical interest in popular cinema with the emergence of the horror film as a major genre of European film production from the late 1950s onwards. During the period in question, horror films were usually exhibited in "*salles spécialisées*", alongside "sexy" films from Germany or "naturist" films from Sweden, in men only cinemas of disreputable reputation. Thus the low position of horror within the economy of taste helped strengthen its cult underground reputation (see the interview with critic Jean-Paul Török in appendix). In the same way that the *MacMahon* cinema was the headquarters of a critical grouping close to *Cahiers du cinéma* with its own journal, *Présence du cinéma*, and a select group of cult *auteurs* (see previous chapter), the *Midi-Minuit* cinema in Paris became the locus of a cinephile movement composed of "manly adventurers".⁴⁸ The *Midi-Minuit*, a men only cinema situated in one of the more disreputable parts of Paris, opened, as its name indicates from 10 am to 12 midnight and punctuated its shows with strip-tease numbers. Gradually, the term "*midi-minuiste*" became synonymous with a particular kind of sensibility that was drawn to the garish, the mysterious, the peculiar and the downright bad in cinema.⁴⁹ The term "midi-minuisme", as Laurent Chollet as noted, "subsequently became a generic term designating genre cinema as well as popular culture more generally".⁵⁰

⁴⁸ See Jane Hollow, "The Masculinity of Cult", in Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lazaro, Julian Stringer and Andrew Willis (eds.), *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 67.

⁴⁹ Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs, *Immoral Tales: Sex and Cinema in Europe 1956-84* (London: Titan Books, 1995).

⁵⁰ Laurent Chollet, above cited, 319.

During the Fifth Republic, economic growth interacted with social change and the expansion of secondary education and the universities created the basis for a large youth culture in France within the context of an affluent society and mass consumerism. With the greater expansion of mass popular culture artefacts such as comic books or the *roman-photo*, interest in popular forms of culture also grew and like rock'n'roll and comic books, these popular art forms gradually became recognised as legitimate cultural phenomena (early comic books militants included such personalities as Alain Resnais and Francis Lacassin).⁵¹ One work from this period, Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* (1957), for instance, offered a series of commentaries on apparently mundane and commercialised forms of cultural expression, mass cultural forms making "everyday life", a valid topic for intellectual reflection.

According to Frédéric Silvaire, "le midi-minuisme" was a movement which resulted from the conjunction of three phenomena: an increasing critical interest in popular genre cinema as a reaction to the overtly and consciously intellectual tendency of cinephilia, especially at *Cahiers du cinéma*; the split of the popular exhibition circuit between local theatres ("*salles de quartiers*") showing westerns and peplums, and specialised theatres ("*salles spécialisées*") showing erotic and horror films, and the release on the market within a short period of time (between 1957 and 1962) of Hammer productions, Italian horror films and peplums, as well as numerous naturist and erotic films.⁵² These films

⁵¹ On the gradual legitimization of comic books in the 1960s and 1970s, see Luc Boltanski, "La constitution du champ de la bande dessinée", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 1, 1975, 37-59.

⁵² Frédéric Silvaire, "Le cinéma 'bis' et la presse: aperçu historique", *Image et Son*, March 1976, 28-39.

were all released within the B-movie circuit of distribution, which came to be known in France as "*cinéma bis*", a circuit of distribution and exhibition which was associated with poor quality films, a base subject matter and a "popular" audience. Cinemas that were part of the "Bis" circuit of exhibition were usually located in the more disreputable parts of Paris, catering for the tastes of what was perceived to be a lowbrow, sleazy and non-educated or foreign audience. The distinction between mainstream film and *cinéma-bis* established within the system of distribution was both economic and concerned with received notions of quality and the cultural:

It is an opposition between noble genres admitted to the system of established values and low ones, which are ignored and more or less accused of vulgarity. This is the second implicit aspect of these categories: *cinéma-bis* is globally more or less a cinema of popular consumption [...] *Cinéma-bis* and films of the fantastic have long been associated. This in itself was already akin to cultural segregation.⁵³

During the 1940s and 1950s, the "fantastique" mode including both science fiction and horror, had been, as in the realm of literature, critically neglected areas in French film criticism, confined by historians of the cinema to the margins. Starting in the late 40s, a new generation of writers and cinephiles, including Boris Vian, the painter Jean Bouillet, the neo-surrealists Ado Kyrou, Robert Benayoun and Georges Golfayn, had begun to champion the fantastic, including horror and science-fiction. *Saint-cinéma-des prés*, however short-lived (three issues between 1949 and 1950) had been as influential journal (featuring articles by Kenneth Anger, Alexandre Astruc, André Bazin, Robert Benayoun, Jean Cocteau, Georges Franju, Adonis Kyrou and Boris Vian).

⁵³ Jean-Marie Sabatier, Daniel Sauvaget, Frédéric Silvaire, Jacques Zimmer, "Approche du cinéma bis", *La revue du cinéma*, 302, January 1976, 32-6.

Boris Vian (as we saw in the last chapter), a leading figure of the young generation had castigated the realist canon of Italian neo-realist films in this journal, championing instead American studio films in Technicolor. In a leading article in the same issue, the painter Jean Boullet lambasted learned cinephilia and called for a new avant-garde:

All this little world pretends to ignore a film if not Italian, silent, Russian or German, necessary conditions as everyone knows, to produce a masterpiece [...] If I have mentioned Robert Florey's *The Beast with Five Fingers* [1946], *G-Men vs. the Black Dragon* [Spencer Gordon Bennet, William Witney 1943], *Tarzan and the Leopard Woman* [Kurt Neumann, 1946] that is because these films seem to me to be representative of the real avant-garde [...] *Yolanda and the Thief* [Vincente Minnelli, 1945] and Ziegfeld Follies are closer to Lautréamont than those works that are laboriously analysed by those specialists of the so-called non-commercial film for local cinema (of the *Bicycle Thieves* type). Long live Méliès and long live Murnau.⁵⁴

Jean Boullet was an early advocate of the fantastic and his articles in *Midi-Minuit fantastique*, *Bizarre* and *La Méthode*, although they were mainly celebratory and more akin to fandom rather than being critical, were like those of Ado Kyrou highly influential and instrumental in the gradual acceptance of the *fantastique* as a culturally legitimate genre. A mythical figure of the French counter-culture in the 50s and 60s, who illustrated the work of Cocteau and Boris Vian amongst others, Boullet has often been described as a maverick figure, as an "extravagant dandy."⁵⁵ As Richard Dyer has noted, from the outset, horror has a long history of being produced and consumed by gays and lesbians.⁵⁶ Boullet's approach to horror was governed by his interest in teratology (tales about mythical or fantastic creatures and monsters) and his

⁵⁴ Jean Boullet, "La nouvelle avant-garde", *Saint-cinéma-des-près*, 2, 1950.

⁵⁵ Jacques Zimmer, "Les années 60/96", in Michel Ciment and Jacques Zimmer (eds.), *La critique de cinéma en France* (Paris: Ramsay, 1997), 104.

⁵⁶ Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers* (London: Routledge, 2001), 70-89.

camp aesthetic could be seen as looking towards the gay liberation movement of the later 60s. In Boulet's always celebratory and lyrical reading of horror, the character of Dracula was identified with isolated outsiderdom and a loathsome desire, the "unseen" of culture which provokes and upsets "normal" society and the social order.⁵⁷ It must be noted, however, that despite the presence of a maverick figure of the camp aesthetic looking forward to the gay liberation movement of the latter half of the 60s, such as Jean Boulet, the fascination with British horror mainly privileged masculine competencies and dispositions with a corresponding emphasis on heterosexual, rather than gay, masculinity while the rejection of an imagined "feminised 'mainstream'" assured its oppositional politics.⁵⁸

The kind of sensibility for which surrealism worked as a kind of background had been expressed in *L'Âge du cinéma* whose contributors began collaborating on the film magazine *Positif*, a young provincial review founded by Bernard Chardère in Lyon in 1952, which maintained strong connections with surrealism throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, and in *Midi-Minuit fantastique*, named after the Parisian cinema, and created in 1962 by publisher Eric Losfeld, founder and editor of the publishing house *Editions du Terrain Vague* and *Positif* publisher from 1959 until 1971. Eric Losfeld had a reputation for publishing controversial material with his publishing imprint and was a central figure of the French counter-culture that was emerging in the late 50s and 60s. According to critic Jean-Paul Török, his Parisian bookshop was a

⁵⁷ See Jean Boulet, *La Galerie des Monstres, Bizarre*, 17-18, 1961.

⁵⁸ Joanne Hollows, "The masculinity of cult", in Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lazaro, Julian Stringer and Andrew Willis (eds.), *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 40.

favoured "midi-minuiste" meeting point (see interview with the author in appendix). Often a target of censorship, Losfeld was the publisher of the books of surrealist Ado Kyrou, the erotic novel *Emmanuelle* (1967), the *Barbarella* science-fiction comic book created by Jean-Claude Forest and *Positif* from 1959 onwards. This gave the magazine the economic stability which it had lacked until then and had prevented its publication on a regular basis. In 1962, Losfeld founded *Midi-Minuit fantastique*, a journal solely dedicated to eroticism, horror and science-fiction and whose critical project was to rehabilitate the fantastic in the belief that "cinema is not the art of the real".⁵⁹ Both *Positif* and *Midi-Minuit fantastique* shared a conception of cinema that was aligned with the idea of the imaginary and its basis in the image without ontology, although not all their criticism should be classified as surrealist. The wave of interest in "minor" genres was also manifested by the creation of specialised cine-clubs allied to *Positif* such as Bertrand Tavernier's *Nickel-Odeon* and Bernard Cohn's *Sine-qua-non*. Between 1959 and 1964, a multitude of magazines emerged (with just five surviving until 1965) in France. Some were close to *Positif*, such as René Chateau's *La Méthode* (1960-63), Francis Gendron and Jean-Louis Pays's *Miroir du cinéma* (1962-65) as well as *Jeune Cinéma*, founded by Jean Delmas in 1964.

The two dominant sources of influence at *Positif* were on the one hand surrealism and on the other, the commitment to left-liberal politics (some of its contributors, such as Paul-Louis Thirard, were engaged against the Algerian war while Michèle Firk, one of the rare female critics at the time, participated

⁵⁹ Michel Caen, "Midi-Minuit historique", *Midi-Minuit fantastique*, 9, 1964, 3.

in revolutionary struggles in Cuba). *Positif* also emphasised the social and political role of cinema. This emphasis led the magazine to feature developing cinematic expression in Asia, Latin America, Africa, Italy, Russia and Britain. Through the writings of Georges Sadoul, Louis Seguin, and Chris Marker, *Positif* engaged in issues involving Third World cinema, censorship and class struggles. *Positif's* tone was caustic and its writers often adopted the associative style of surrealism. Although sharing fundamental values with *Cahiers* such as the promotion of *auteur* cinema (albeit different *auteurs*) and B-movies and popular cinema in general, its libertarian attitudes, inherited from surrealism, also made *Positif* champion exotic adventure films, animation, horror, Jerry Lewis, musicals and Italian comedy. It must be noted however, that although both *Cahiers* and *Positif* liked and praised American cinema, they did not so in the same way or in the same spirit. Indeed, as Thomas Elsaesser has noted, the enthusiasm at *Positif* was of a rather different kind:

In all cases, what was stressed was the subversive element in 'pop', where Hollywood could provide additional fire-power in the revolt against bourgeois notions of appeasement, sobriety and taste in art. It is obviously essential to keep the middle-class, consciously intellectual approach to the American cinema via Welles, Wyler and the catholic left around Bazin, distinct from the militant anti-bourgeois, anti-academic enthusiasm of the Surrealists.⁶⁰

Positif was particularly dismissive of Hitchcock and of the application of Catholic tenets to his works in *Cahiers du cinéma*. Against the apolitical posture of the *politique des auteurs*, which crystallised its opposition to that

⁶⁰ Thomas Elsaesser, "Two Decades in another country: Hollywood and the Cinephiles", in Chris Bigsby (ed.), *Superculture, American Popular Culture and Europe* (London: Paul Elek, 1975), 207.

journal, *Positif* held Alfred Hitchcock and Roberto Rossellini in contempt and instead championed Luis Buñuel, John Huston, Jean Vigo, Michelangelo Antonioni, Andrzej Wajda and Akira Kurosawa amongst others. At the beginning of the 60s, they launched verbal attacks against the films of the French New Wave (Jean-Luc Godard would remain a particular blindspot) and instead favoured the young cinemas of Italy, West Germany or Latin America as well as Free Cinema and the British New Wave.⁶¹

Politics had an overdetermining influence on the rift with *Cahiers du cinéma* (see the interview with Jean-Paul Török in Appendix). In the early 1960s, the journal virulently denounced the "rightist" tendencies of most New Wave films and in a long critical study on the ideology of André Bazin, Gérard Gozlan offered an analysis of the use of ambiguity in the Catholic theorist's work as a refusal to take sides.⁶² The studies of Raymond Borde, Freddy Buache and Jean Curtelin under the title *Nouvelle Vague* also denounced the films of the New Wave with similar arguments.⁶³ In a polemic Robert Benayoun attacked the New Wave as "a school of ultra-bourgeois expression", denouncing its directors who "refuse to commit themselves" and "escape into formalism". Benayoun described the *Positif* critical line thus:

We shall stand up for the principle of internationalism, which destroys outdated concepts of schools and throws into relief the significant and constant values of the moment [...] We shall not indulge in the

⁶¹ Jean-Paul Török, "Le monde des Non-U", *Positif*, 37, January 1961, 20-3, "Le lugubre cinéma anglais", *Positif*, 43, June 1961, 35-45, "Qu'est-ce que le Free Cinema?", *Positif*, 49, December 1962, 13-20, Robert Benayoun, "Quand le yorkshire exprime sa colère", *Positif*, 53, June 1963, 41-2.

⁶² "Feux sur le cinéma français", *Positif*, 46, June 1962; Gérard Gozlan, "Eloge d'André Bazin", *Positif* 46 and 47, June and July 1962, translated as "In Praise of André Bazin", in Peter Graham (ed.), *The New Wave* (London: Secker & Warburg, Bfi, 1968), 52-71.

⁶³ see Raymond Borde, Freddy Buache, and Jean Curtelin, *Nouvelle Vague* (Lyon: S.E.R.D.O.C, 1962).

unbelievable glibness of talking about the cinema solely in technical terms, we shall refuse to set any limits to our imagination, and we shall subject film to all kind of analogy. We shall base our appreciation of cinema on the identification of the intellectual content with its external envelope, and we shall make a sharp distinction between personal style and the mannerism of the day. We shall go back to the fundamental idea of a 'personal universe' that was established by the review *L'Âge du cinéma*. We shall answer any attempts to confuse by applying unruffled analysis which, while completely impervious to notions of fashion, will not exclude the wildest interpretation.⁶⁴

What seemed to be at stake in Benayoun's polemic were the authority of *Cahiers*'s critical standpoint and the legitimacy of the New Wave. The rivalry between the two groups of critics suggests a situation that Bourdieu had described as a struggle to define "the field of cultural production". As he remarked, this is done by "conferring aesthetic status on objects or ways of representing them that are excluded by the dominant aesthetic of the time, or on objects that are given aesthetic status by dominated aesthetic".⁶⁵

In the same way that *Cahiers du cinéma* had used Hollywood as a weapon against the French cinema establishment in the 1950s, the *Positif* and *Midi-Minuit fantastique* stance towards the horror film was motivated by deploring such lack in French cinema. These critics also used "bad" taste aesthetics as a tool of cultural distinction and the cultural lowliness which horror and British cinema represented to challenge the canon and the bourgeois sensibility of middlebrow critics. While the film of the New Wave were being celebrated in the late 1950s, most critics at the time were scathing about horror and science fiction, perceiving it as a debased commercial production and thus incapable of addressing serious subject matter (see for instance, Truffaut's polemic against

⁶⁴ Robert Benayoun, "The King is Naked", *Positif*, 46, June 1962 translated, in Peter Graham, above cited, 178-9.

⁶⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, above cited, 1984, 47.

Val Guest's *The Quatermass Experiment* in the previous chapter). Before discussing how British horror acquired such a cult status in France, the next section examines the dominant critical attitudes to horror at the start of their "classical" period, mainly 1957-64, by looking at the reception of Terence Fisher's *Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1958) in mainstream film criticism, considering in particular the reasons why horror was such a disreputable genre in the first place.

British Horror in Context

Just as science fiction and the horror genres were not "respectable" and legitimate cultural objects, in addition, one cannot talk of a proper tradition of the horror genre in French cinema. The emergence of the horror film with Hammer and other British companies, alongside Italian filmmakers such as Mario Bava and Riccardo Freda and American filmmakers such as Roger Corman was representative of a trend across much popular cinema during the 1960s and 1970s, except in France. Although the French avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s were drawn to horror in the work of Edgar Allan Poe, the French tradition of fantastic cinema (traces of which can be found in the work of Alain Resnais and Jacques Demy) and horror in particular (which can be seen in the highly idiosyncratic and uncommercial work of Jean Rollin, such as *Le Viol du Vampire* (1967) and *La Vampire nue* (1969)), has been very marginal. French filmmakers were more inclined towards what French critics termed the "*fantastique*" which had links with Surrealism, rather than horror.

The *fantastique* was exemplified by Jean Cocteau's haunting fairy-tale, *La Belle et la Bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1946) and Georges Franju *Les Yeux sans visage* (*Eyes Without a Face*, 1959). Although France produced many films with fantastic elements with Georges Méliès, René Clair's *Paris qui dort* (1923) or "science-fiction" films, such as Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1961), Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965) and François Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), these were all individual works and the horror film never crystallised or cohered as a popularly received genre. In Britain, however, from the 50s onwards, horror became a flourishing popular genre. In 1951, the arrival of the "X" certificate had encouraged production companies to use horror to attract an increasingly younger audience, during a decade when cinema admissions were declining in the face of competition from television and other popular amusements. Horror films thus carried the X certificate which had been introduced by the British Board of Film Censors in 1951 for films with adult themes and those that foregrounded sexuality, adulterous relationships, violence and "poor" morals. All these films received an X whereas before they might have been severely cut or not passed at all by the British Board of Film Censors.

British and Italian films introduced colour into the genre in the late 50s as well as relatively graphic depictions of violence and sexuality, all this played out in period settings and in studio reproductions of Victorian England. The films featured actresses in low-cut dresses and Dracula, played by Christopher Lee was dandified and eroticised. As Vivian Sobchack has observed:

The containment provided by literary tradition, generic convention, and period costume allowed Hammer's Gothic horror films to exploit eroticism and sadism beyond what was generally acceptable in more

realistic genres.⁶⁶

As censorship relaxed in the 60s, British horror generally became more and more explicit in the areas of sex and violence and Hammer studios gradually increased the violent and bloody excesses in the films as well as nudity and the implication of "perverse" encounters. In Britain, horror films were produced by several small companies such as Amicus, Tigon, Tyburn, whilst Anglo-Amalgamated also produced a notable body of work with *Horrors of the Black Museum* (1959), *Circus of Horrors* (1959) and *Peeping Tom* (1960). However, it was Hammer that had inaugurated the British horror boom with *The Curse of Frankenstein* (Terence Fisher, 1957), a film that also helped to establish Terence Fisher as a specialist in the horror genre. Hammer studios reworked the gothic stories of Frankenstein and Dracula and remade the classic versions of Dracula and Frankenstein that had been produced at Universal Pictures during the 1930s, with a cycle of films such as *Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), *Revenge of Frankenstein*, (1958), *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1967), *Dracula* (1958), *The Brides of Dracula* (1960), *Dracula-Prince of Darkness* (1966). Hammer films have been seen as the true descendants of the *Grand-Guignol* form of the French "Theatre of Horror" of the rue Chaptal in the Pigalle area of Paris that had started in 1897. The *Grand Guignol* used a highly theatrical, melodramatic style of performance, which foregrounded sadistic and apparently "live horror" effects. Ironically, the *Grand-Guignol* theatre closed its doors in 1962 so that its demise and final decline "coincided with the

⁶⁶ Vivian Sobchack, "The Fantastic", in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (ed.), *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1996), 320.

ascendancy of the Hammer film".⁶⁷ In general, the films displayed what Julian Petley has described as

A sensation of powerfully negative, barely suppressed desires, in which violence, sexuality, and death are inextricably mixed, almost dripping from the screen".⁶⁸

It has become received wisdom that in Britain the early Hammer horror films were greeted with howls of protest from critics.⁶⁹ The first commentator to take Hammer seriously was David Pirie who, writing towards the end of the horror cycle in the early 70s, suggested that the films should be placed within the Gothic tradition that could be traced back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century English novel. Pirie has claimed that Hammer was:

A production company utterly unlike anything that the British cinema had previously known. There is a very slight echo of Ealing in the structure that emerged, but perhaps the most obvious analogy is with one of the small Hollywood studios of the 1930s and 40s like Republic or Monogram; for almost overnight Hammer became a highly efficient factory for a vast series of exploitation pictures made on tight budgets with a repertory company of actors and a small, sometimes overexposed series of locations surrounding their tiny Buckinghamshire estate.⁷⁰

Pirie has also argued that the stunted growth of the Surrealist movement in Britain made it possible for a submerged, unconscious Surrealism to emerge in British horror films and that the quality of

Methodical and unselfconscious eccentricity (or rational irrationality) that Breton and his co-founders of the movement detected in M.G. Lewis and Mrs Radcliffe permeated British horror films".⁷¹

⁶⁷ Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2002), 25.

⁶⁸ Julian Petley, "The Lost Continent", in Charles Barr, above cited, 116.

⁶⁹ See Julien Petley, "A Crude Sort of Entertainment for a Crude Sort of Audience: The British Critics and Horror Cinema", in Steven Chibnall and Julien Petley (eds.), *British Horror Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002), 23-41.

⁷⁰ David Pirie, *A Heritage of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema, 1946-1972* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1973), 42

⁷¹ Pirie, above cited, 20-1.

In France, where such indigenous films were not produced, the horror films coming from Britain became synonymous with a whole generation of voyeuristic and sadistic films. The horror genre was implicitly associated with the erotic and although the reception of British horror in France was by no means uniformly negative, it nonetheless attracted sufficient negative comments.

As the first major British horror film in the post-war period, Terence Fisher's *Dracula* made a considerable impact in France. In *Positif* of July 1961, the film was described as "no doubt the most beautiful vampire film since F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*" and the following year, when the first issue of the journal *Midi-Minuit fantastique* appeared, it was solely dedicated to Terence Fisher.⁷² When *Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1958) was released in Paris on 4th February 1959 in six local cinemas (Atlantic, Avenue, Bataclan, Comédia, Vedettes et Midi-Minuit), the film was ignored, derided or dismissed by a significant number of critics. It was neither reviewed nor mentioned in the cine-club magazines *Cinéma 59* and *Image et Son*, whilst in *Cahiers du cinéma*, the film was received as yet another example of the proverbial decadence of British cinema and dismissed in a few condescending lines,

Mass-produced vampires. If English humour does not make anyone laugh anymore, one could not say the same of this new series coming from perfidious Albion.⁷³

Similarly for the *Cahiers du cinéma* critic Jean Douchet, writing in the cultural magazine *Arts*, the film was worthless:

⁷² Jean-Paul Török, "H Pictures" (II), *Positif*, 40, July 1961, translated in Michel Ciment and Laurence Kardish (eds.), *Positif: 50 Years: Selections from the French film Journal* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2003), 68.

⁷³ Anon, "Autres films", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 95, 1959.

Terence Fisher has ventured into remaking *Dracula* and the admirable *Nosferatu* that he so crudely plagiarises [...] one notices a hideous use of colour, actors who could apply for the worst acting prize. To be avoided.⁷⁴

In *La Saison Cinématographique* of 1959, the film was derided as formulaic and Terence Fisher's direction as poor and tired:

All the attributes of the horror film have been condensed and thrown in by Terence Fisher in order to scare us. He has used all the old tricks; creaking doors, coffins and so on, as well as new ones such as dripping red blood [...] But he only manages to make us laugh, so ridiculous is his mise en scene and his story. We think, moreover, that he must have had a good laugh directing this new rehash after a dozen of others. Average spectator, don't take your children, and if you must, go with friends, there's reason to laugh.⁷⁵

As we have seen previously, the central position of cinema in the national culture also meant that as a mode of mass entertainment, it was considered as an educational tool and as an instrument of popular education of social importance. In addition to its supposed lack of aesthetic value, then, the sensational nature of the subject matter in the horror film raised deep concerns about the effects of these images upon audiences such as children, especially in publications that were linked to the Catholic movement in education. As the critic Jacques Siclier noted anxiously in his review of the film:

There is no doubt that beneath its unusual exterior a film like *Dracula* contains germs that are harmful enough to sow confusion in certain minds. Parents and educators should rightly show some worry. There also remains the possibility not to go and see this kind of film and thus spare oneself of these disturbing emotions.⁷⁶

The most violent and polemical review was without contest that of Gilbert

⁷⁴ Jean Douchet, "Sinistre", *Arts*, 18 February 1959.

⁷⁵ Jean-Jacques Camelin, "Un an de cinéma anglais", *La Saison cinématographique* (Paris; Citevox éditeur, 1959),

⁷⁶ Jacques Siclier: "la terreur pour tous et même pour les enfants?", *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision*, 78, 1958, 71.

Salachas in *Télé-Ciné*, a widely read publication and the organ of the FLEEC, the Catholic branch of the *Ligue Française de l'Enseignement* movement whose focus was the moral well being of the young people of France, as well as their cultural development. This review is worth quoting at length as an illustration of the reservations expressed against the horror film for moral reasons:

This film goes well beyond the common immorality the bien-pensants reproach of cinema [...] yet, curiously, the most severe censors never seem to notice this kind of immorality. I am not just talking about the slightly degrading game which consists in giving a consenting public a small or rather large dose of horror and shiver which comes under the global phenomenon recognised as sado-masochism [...] In *Dracula*, a whole apparel of monstrous sadism is added to the classical techniques of the horror film. *Dracula* bites his victims and shows the audience his bleeding chops from whence emerge overdeveloped teeth. The so-called victims are in general well-thinking women who take to the biting and the sucking. We then see them waiting for the sucking monster, swooning, in a state approaching amorous ecstasy, in a trance of abandon and anticipated orgasm. In their turn they become vampires with prominent teeth, in their turn they seek to taste the blood of others. So much abjection is “morally” compensated by the final destruction of Dracula who becomes dust under our eyes: it is the triumph of good over evil through a symbolic instrument: the crucifix. Has one ever seen such aberrant use of the sacred? Incidentally, this overdone, odious and degrading film, accompanied by a conventional soundtrack is not even well done technically.⁷⁷

The critical neglect and rejection of these films, however, was also related to their mode of production and exhibition and their status as debased mass cultural objects as previously discussed. In this context, whilst the stance towards the horror genre was motivated by deploring such a lack in French cinema, the critical bias against the horror film in many ways reinforced the establishment of an anti-canon of cult cinema that was celebrated for its apparent opposition to the “mainstream”. Hammer films became the object of a

⁷⁷ 82, April 1959.

cult; not least because of the way they brought out the usually disguised sexual subtexts of Gothic horror in a national production usually perceived as puritanical. The female vampires were eroticised women who corrupted men through their sexuality and these females, dressed in low-cut Victorian dresses, craved fulfilment in the bite of Dracula. The representation of these women doubtless helped to swell the horror film's cult male following, but for those critics who objected to the film, these orgasmic women who seemed to enjoy their vampirism in a film that was immoral, perverse, anti-religious, sensationalist and aesthetically objectionable.

Such negative values were precisely to be championed by the cult followers of British horror. As a series of British horror films began to be released in France, they represented for the cultural elite the embodiment of tastelessness. However, their use value for a new generation of French critics was their challenge to cultural hierarchies, their parents' strict codes of behaviour and the dominant cinephile taste. In a climate where censorship restrictions of erotic works were rife and where the films were rejected on the grounds of their lack of morality, the sexual attractiveness of the vampires in Hammer films and the expression of "perversions" were seen as culturally and even politically challenging. Moreover, the attraction of British horror was also based on a literary ideal of the fantastic in English gothic literature, concerned with describing desire in its excessive forms as well as its various transformations or perversions which was associated with a particular kind of "Englishness". As the films increasingly located their Romantic Gothic horrors in English settings set in idealised Victorian towns, British horror was considered typically British and substantially superior to the Universal horror films of the

1930s they were inspired by.

Horror films were in cultural terms "British" in a very specific way and in contrast to Jacques Rivette's assertion that British genres "have no genuine roots", critic Jean-Paul Török defined the British horror film, exemplified by Hammer's output, as "a new and clearly defined cinematic genre with its own rules and styles". In contrast with the norms of Universal studios classics of the 30s featuring stars such as Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi and Lon Chaney Jnr, the merit of Hammer horror in particular, Jean-Paul Török insisted, was the studio's idea of replacing *Frankenstein* within the literary context of "dark romanticism".⁷⁸ The success of the "new British horror school" depended, as Török indicated, on the commercial realities of British cinema and on the typically British way of conceiving of filmmaking as collective teamwork, in contrast with the consciously intellectual *auteur* cinema of the French New Wave, and on the extreme importance of the actors. But the genre also depended on other elements including what he described as "its power of suggestion and frenzy, its invitation to journey to the land of black marvels and imaginary eroticism".⁷⁹

The most distinctive features of the horror films produced in Britain (certainly for French critics) was their strong links to the English Gothic tradition of fantasy literature and their colourful and highly sexualised reworking of the Gothic cultural mythology. In addition, British horror appealed to critics aligned with the surrealist movement because the fantastic, the eruption of what Freud has called the uncanny within the real, was positioned as central to

⁷⁸ Jean-Paul Torok, above cited: 46.

⁷⁹ Jean-Paul Török, above cited: 51.

their conception and definition of cinema. Thus, in the same way that Hollywood had fascinated *Cahiers du cinéma* and acted as a counterpoint to their own cultural conventions, the "otherness" and exoticism of British cinema appealed to *Positif* and *Midi-Minuit fantastique* whose conception of Englishness was radically opposed to that of the French New Wave. As Timothy Corrigan has argued, "cultural distance allows for the textual transformation of cult audiences" so that "viewers get to go places, see things and manipulate customs in a way that no indigenous member of that culture or mainstream filmgoer normally would".⁸⁰ Thus whereas from Truffaut's perspective British cinema was associated with a "subdued way of life", the appropriation of horror was used by this specific group of critics to mark out their difference in the social and critical domain through the invocation of a "dark imaginary", an exotic elsewhere, a mythic England as "the world of black marvels and imaginary eroticism".⁸¹

The term *noir* has in France an older history than that of as the description of *film noir*. It describes the *roman noir*, or Gothic novel. In French literary criticism, "it suggests the decadent tendencies of late romanticism".⁸² As James Naremore has suggested in his study of the critical idea of film *noir* in France, "Surrealism was crucial for any art described as *noir*". Both Raymond Borde (a regular contributor to *Positif* and on the editorial board of *Midi-Minuit fantastique*) and Etienne Chaumeton were indebted to Surrealism,

⁸⁰ Timothy Corrigan, "Film and the Culture of Cult", J.P. Telotte, *The Cult Film Experience: Beyond All Reason* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 27.

⁸¹ Jean-Paul Török, "H-Pictures", *Positif*, 39, May 1961, translated in Michel Ciment and Laurence Kardish (eds.), *Positif 50 Years, Selections from the French Film Journal* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002), 71.

⁸² James Naremore, above cited, 281.

Especially in their great emphasis 'on the theme of death', and on essential 'effective' qualities: oneiric, bizarre, erotic, ambivalent and cruel.⁸³

Interestingly, in their *Panorama du film noir américain* published in 1955, Borde and Chaumeton had argued that there existed an authentic *noir* cycle of films in England, which they distinguished as a place where the theme of death and the qualities of cruelty and sadism were a kind of national sport:

Puritan and sexually obsessed England has for over a century had a rather weird criminal history. It is perhaps more than any other the country of refined murders and cruelties and sadistic outbursts [...] All these factors may have played a role in the development of an authentic British *série noire* since 1946.⁸⁴

In the same way that the two critics had claimed a connection between a series of British *noirs* and certain aspects of the English way of life, according to Török, the realm of horror as sexual pathology appeared to connect with the very essence of things British, "England has always had a record number of sexual attacks and crimes and the character of the Peeping Tom is familiar enough so that a film can be dedicated to it".⁸⁵ Török's construction of the horror genre as typically British was thus related to the economic structures of the British film industry which he contrasted with the French, its links to a longstanding literary Gothic tradition and assumptions about the British character. It addressed what the critic saw as specific aspects of "Britishness", viewed from France, which the films set out to challenge. Just as *film noir* had been perceived to form a disruptive component of American cinema by

⁸³ Naremore, above cited, 17, 19.

⁸⁴ Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, *Panorama du film noir Américain 1941-1953* (1st edition, 1955, 2nd ed., Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 154.

⁸⁵ H-Pictures (II), *Positif*, 39, May 61,55, translated in Michel Ciment and Laurence Kardish, *Positif 50 Years: Selections from the French film journal* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2003), 71.

surrealist critics Borde and Chaumeton in 1955, according to Jean-Paul Török,

Through their violently morbid aspect, their contempt for good taste and conventions, their pronounced eroticism, these works were symptomatic of a greater moral freedom, which is rather remarkable since it was expressed within a commercial cinema.⁸⁶

In *Midi-Minuit fantastique*, Englishness was also imagined in a very specific way: "England is the country of Jack The Ripper, Swift, the chosen land of ghosts and the country where there is the most sexual crimes" and the sexual pathology which they read within the horror film appeared to connect with the essence of things British.⁸⁷ The acting was highly significant in this particular thematic configuration. As Van Helsing, Peter Cushing had an "impassive icy beauty and sovereign elegance" while Christopher Lee's Dracula "radiated a fascinating and romantic beauty".⁸⁸ Both actors embodied the chief characteristics of the "Fatal Men" of the Romantics with Cushing as a dandy and Lee as a neo-Byronic hero with erotic magnetism. As David Pirie has noted, the overriding impression that the cruel Fatal Man was a manifestation of a real English trend is of "immense significance in analysing the appropriateness of English horror films with English actors as an international phenomenon".⁸⁹ The Fatal man as a satanic English Milord was brought to perfection by Lord Byron and in romantic literature the vampire gradually took on a Byronic colour. It is interesting to note how the figure of the count is caught up and transformed by different social contexts. Viewed from France, Christopher Lee appeared as an outlaw aristocrat, the archetypal figure of the

⁸⁶ Jean-Paul Török, "Le monde des Non-U", *Positif*, 37, January 1961, 20.

⁸⁷ Michel Nuridsay, "Welcome Monster Lovers", *Minuit-Midi fantastique*, 1, 1962, 5.

⁸⁸ Török, in Ciment and Kardish, above cited, 68.

⁸⁹ Pirie, above cited, 17.

Romantic Byronic hero as a character with erotic magnetism. Lee as Dracula was a tall, dark, cultured and mannered dandy with an aura of sin and secret suffering.

In *The Romantic Agony*, Mario Praz provided an extensive survey of the dark and often violent erotic sensibility of nineteenth-century romantic literature. In no other area, he notes, has eroticism played such a central part in the literary imagination and since the Romantic period when the Gothic novel had absorbed aspects of German romanticism, "Englishness" in Europe had been associated with cold cruelty and with a fascination with sights of suffering. This came about with the figure of George Selwyn, a sadistic English nobleman who had travelled to Paris to watch the execution of Damiens in 1756. The French term "*vice anglais*" came to define a specifically English form of sexual disposition associated with sadism and refers as much to watching flagellation and other violence for sexual pleasure as having it inflicted upon one.⁹⁰

In the second half of the nineteenth century within the literary canon, the vampire would become a woman and in European Gothic horror films, the image of the sexually conscious "Fatal Woman", or *La belle dame sans merci* came from the British cult actress Barbara Steele who made horror films in Italy, America and Britain. In her roles as a lecherous vampire or a witch, especially in Italian horror films, her "criminal" sexuality and her morbid eroticism associated with violence, fear and death, made her an icon and a star

⁹⁰ On the development of the idea of "le vice anglais" and the French attribution of sadism as an English character, see Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 435-457.

of horror, in the words of Gérard Lenne, Steele was "the outright muse of 60s horror".⁹¹

According to Jean-Jacques Pauvert, famous for publishing the work of the Marquis de Sade in the early 50s as well as the novel *Histoire d'O* by Pauline Réage in 1954, in the late 50s, eroticism became one of the main subjects of conversation.⁹² The cinema of the period reflected this preoccupation, with the appearance of films with sexually explicit content such as *Baby Doll* (Elia Kazan, 1956) in the United States, and in Europe, Roger Vadim's *And God Created Woman* (1956), Ingmar Bergman's *Summer with Monika* (1952), Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana* (1961), Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960) and the enormous popularity on both continents of sex symbols such as Brigitte Bardot and Marilyn Monroe, Jayne Mansfield and Diana Dors. The new prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s underlay changes in social and sexual mores that became more evident after 1968 and Bardot in many ways crystallised values of sexual freedom at a transitional period in France in terms of sexual mores. France still lived in a climate of traditional family values and the discursive rise of eroticism can be seen as way of addressing post-war social and cultural changes and the transition that was underway in the 1950s between post-war moralism and pre 1968 liberalism. With the affluent society and the rise of mass consumerism, in the 50s France was also experiencing important economic and social changes, especially in the realm of gender relations as

⁹¹ Gérard Lenne, *Cela s'appelle l'horreur: le cinéma fantastique anglais, 1955-1976* (Paris: Lignes, S.A., 1989), 74. See also *Midi Minuit fantastique*, special issue on Barbara Steele, 17, 1967.

⁹² Jean-Jacques Pauvert, *Anthologie historique des lectures érotiques de Eisenhower à Emmanuelle, 1945-1985* (Paris: Editions Ramsay, 1995), 374.

women's struggles to achieve gender equality were gathering momentum. It thus seems that the pleasures generated by horror, one of the most "masculine" of genres, as Peter Hutchings has described it, can be conceptualised as a form of masochism which operates "in this gap, in this space between what might be termed the unrealisable ideal or symbolic of masculinity and the real". Hutchings argues that "the pleasure involved in this process for the male audience derives from the way in which the disempowerment of the male spectator doesn't just reconfirm feelings of power", but also

Serves to cover over the fact that this spectator's hold on power is structural and provisional rather than personal. This arguably provides one of the reasons for the fact that the male audience for horror is predominantly an adolescent one".⁹³

Indeed, the emphasis on the sadistic and masochistic elements of horror not only revealed sexist fantasies and fears about the feminine but also a reaction to the perceived threat of feminine emancipation. This threat was converted in the horror genre into a traditional projection of the all devouring woman, the *femme fatale* which crystallised in the cult for Barbara Steele with her image of the dangerous lady with a black widow beauty. The cinephile fascination with the erotics of woman's body on the screen was thriving and, like the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics, the 1950s and 1960s the young neo-surrealists openly boasted of their erotomania whilst a plethora of cinema books and special issues of film journals on eroticism were published and even André Bazin dedicated some "marginal notes on eroticism in the cinema".⁹⁴ Thus whereas the gender

⁹³ Peter Hutchings, "Masculinity and the Horror Film", in Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumin (eds.), *You Tarzan, Masculinity, Movies and Men* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), 92.

⁹⁴ André Bazin, "Marginal Notes on Eroticism in the Cinema", in *What is Cinema?* Vol. II, translated, by Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press,

politics of the New Wave reflected, as Geneviève Sellier has argued, the misogynist dimension of the Romantic artist, for this section of cinephilia, the image of the female star functioned as a site of erotic spectacle and fascination, acting as a defence against the castration anxiety that the body of the woman may generate.⁹⁵ Indeed, as Robert Benayoun suggested, while Surrealism exalted *la femme*, the Surrealists did not equally revere *les femmes*.⁹⁶

British horror also began appearing during a period that saw the development of a fashionable *érotisme noir* (an eroticism which included explicit elements of sadism) in French intellectual culture with a steadily increasing vogue for the figure of the Marquis de Sade, building on the foundations of the 1920s' surrealist cult for his writings. The fact that de Sade functioned as an object of fascination for the surrealists was due to his eminence within the broader literary genre of the fantastic; his work was considered as a precursor of the *roman noir*, as well as its preoccupation with limit experiences, especially regarding the relation between Eros and Thanatos, two favourite surrealist themes. In the Manifesto of the Surrealists concerning *L'Age d'or*, the relations between love and death and the name of de Sade were evoked with unrestrained sexual desire as a basis for revolution, whilst the 1959 international surrealist exhibition held in Paris in 1959 was dedicated to the theme of Eros. What had attracted the surrealists to de Sade was the idea that beneath our conscious thought processes, we have a seething, potentially subversive subconscious, which is censored or held in check by a set of social

1971), 169-175.

⁹⁵ see Geneviève Sellier, above cited, 2002.

⁹⁶ Robert Benayoun, *Érotisme du Surréalisme* (Paris: Bibliothèque Internationale d'Érotologie, 1965), 87.

norms and its agents. According to Nicholas Harrison, the reception of de Sade's work in France was always shaped by the censorship to which it was subject:

Censored material, according to Freud, was predominantly sexual and Freudian censorship was subsequently revitalised and reinserted into a politicised discourse in French literary culture.⁹⁷

The period between the end of the war and the end of the 1960s was a period of extreme censorship in France and the principle of the protection of youth together with the defence of public morality were the basis of all prosecutions of adult fiction during this period. In 1949 it became illegal to expose minors under 18 to publications of a "licentious or pornographic nature". In 1958, on General de Gaulle's election to the presidency, the scope of this provision was widened considerably, to the point of forbidding display of such material "in any place whatever".⁹⁸ Thus for many intellectuals and artists eroticism was perceived as having a unique role. WWII was occasionally a more or less the explicit reference point and Sade was even credited as having prefigured the dehumanisation of humans in concentration camps. However, as Susan Rubin Suleiman has pointed out, in its pursuit of the radically transgressive, avant-garde culture has often displayed a misogynist cast.⁹⁹ The surrealists were oblivious to the realities of sexual politics and they obscured the very obvious sexism of much of Sade's writings. Thinking about the way in which a whole generation of French intellectuals appropriated the dubious celebration of

⁹⁷ Nicholas Harrison, *Circles of Censorship: Censorship and its Metaphors in French History, Literature and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 143.

⁹⁸ Robert Netz, *Histoire de la censure dans l'édition* (Paris: Puf, 1997).

⁹⁹ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990).

sexual violence which "they elevated to the dignity and the status of an existential metaphysics of liberation"¹⁰⁰, Noël Burch has argued that it is possible that the atrocities of WWII might have fed this neo-Sadian imaginary since the Sadean canon in the post-war period proceeded:

From a major taboo, forbidding any link whatsoever to be made between these detailed descriptions of sexual tortures perpetrated by men and their equivalent in the real world onto the bodies of real women, for instance in concentration camps, or in the case of rape with murder.¹⁰¹

Burch also contends that the cult of Sade and the eroticisation of the morals and politics attached to his writings have historically occupied a central place in the formation of what he calls the modernist ideology of France, whilst for Nancy Huston, the renaissance of the genre of "*érotisme noir*" or a dark eroticism founded on women's abjection was part of a French tendency that consists in eroticising certain phenomena in order to neutralise them emotionally, socially and politically. This, she contends, worked as a cultural strategy aiming to exorcise and thus neutralise the emotional impact of the unthinkable violence of Auschwitz and Hiroshima.¹⁰² Thus the neo-Sadian imaginary and the renaissance of a Sadean *érotisme noir* and violence was a link which has to be made with the social context of the post-war period reception of horror. Moreover, in the late 50s and early 60s, France experienced a replay of violence with the Algerian crisis and it seems that violence was a potent symbol that appealed to a generation who were suffering directly, or indirectly through their parents from the upheavals of the post-war

¹⁰⁰ Noël Burch, "Femmes, modernisme et pouvoir", in Odile Krakovitch, Geneviève Sellier and Éliane Viennot (eds.), *Femmes de pouvoir: mythes et fantasme* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 168.

¹⁰¹ Burch, *ibid*, 169.

¹⁰² Nancy Huston, "La belle et le bellum", *La Lettre Internationale*, Spring 1992, 50.

period. The years between 1958 and 1962 were a time when France was experiencing traumatic upheaval with decolonisation and the Algerian war of independence, an episode ridden with violence on both sides and torture on the side of the French, recalling uncomfortably the Nazi occupation of France. In his book on Jean Boullet, the mythical figure of the French camp counter-culture and early exponent of the fantastic, Denis Chollet has argued that the fascination with horror was far from innocent and that the political troubles France was experiencing no doubt generated,

The development of a pathological behaviour in the most sensitive of citizens, a kind of infantile exaltation with the pleasure of finding refuge in scary images [...] The expression of sexuality (in its diverse forms) as a possibility to retort to the government which censures more and more, finds through celluloid monsters a new way of keeping sensual faculties alive.¹⁰³

Chollet also relates the camp reading of horror as a response to "the military and civil conflicts of the period of the Algerian war, where refined methods of torture move from one camp to the other and are just another form of sado-masochist expression".¹⁰⁴ In this context, Gothic horror may be seen as having provided an allegory and a vehicle for the battle between the forces of good and evil (an immensely problematic question in the context of the Algerian war and the collapse of the Fourth republic) and as a challenge to bourgeois morals and religion for its unleashing of uncontrollable disorder and unfettered desire.

Although not confined to surrealist writers, the central place of eroticism in French intellectual culture gradually fed into the libertarian counter-culture

¹⁰³ Denis Chollet, *Jean Boullet le précurseur* (Nice: Feel/ France Europe Édition Livres 1999), 63.

¹⁰⁴ Chollet, above cited, *ibid.*

where de Sade was reinvented as an exemplary outcast. As the decade wore on, horror and vampirism acted as a metaphor for subversive sex in the context of an emerging culture of sexual liberation which nevertheless existed in a period of strict moral codes where an authoritarian, paternalist and moralist Gaullist state meant that censorship and the protection of youth was paramount. The position of the surrealists in the post-war years was close to that of Herbert Marcuse who wrote in *Eros and Civilisation*, published in 1963, that perversions were culturally inadmissible in the capitalist system because they did not fulfil the patriarchal requirement that normal sex must be "socially useful and good". Within a rhetoric of libertarian resistance to the representation of dominant bourgeois and capitalist values, eroticism and pornography were thus at the centre of the emerging culture which would lead to May 1968. At a time when the sexual and feminist revolutions had not yet exploded, pornography and eroticism still carried with them the sulphur of liberation as a direct challenge to the status quo. As Laurent Gervereau has noted, in the realm of the emerging figurative art scene which used commercial products of popular culture such as comic books as a source of inspiration, most works "emphasised the body, the female body in particular" and the "Surrealist woman, mysterious, idealised and as an object of desire haunts all these works".¹⁰⁵ This phenomenon showed in the output of editor Eric Losfeld and the fact that the numerous illustrations that always accompanied the dossiers and articles in *Midi-Minuit fantastique* became increasingly

¹⁰⁵ Laurent Gervereau, "Life in the Image", in David Alan Mellor and Laurent Gervereau (eds.), *The Sixties, Britain and France, 1962-1973: The Utopian Years* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers Limited, 1997), 64.

pornographic. Losfeld, who specialised in surrealist books, erotics novels and "adult" comic books was often the target of censorship. From issue 20 onwards, *Midi-Minuit fantastique* was forbidden to under 18s. In tandem with the numerous other fines the publisher incurred under accusations of publishing pornographic material, this ban affected the journal which ceased publishing in 1971. Yet, thanks to the work of *Midi-Minuit fantastique*, the cultural respectability of the fantastic genre and of British horror in particular was put into place and compounded by the publication of three books in rapid succession.¹⁰⁶ *Peeping Tom* which took central place in these historical surveys, was erected as the most subversive of all horror films and thus as a masterpiece of the fantastic.

***Peeping Tom* and its Critical Reception**

While, as I have shown, British horror films became celebrated by the *Positif* and *Midi-Minuit fantastique* critical faction, *Peeping Tom* was singled out as unique. Its uniqueness was constructed through the *auteur* status of its director Michael Powell. Whereas Jean-Paul Török had discussed British horror on the basis of genre and had argued that "it would be pushing things to far to argue that the revelation of British horror makes Fisher an *auteur*"¹⁰⁷, *Peeping Tom* was not produced by Hammer. It was also a different case in that it was set in contemporary London and was explicit in its depiction of the equation of

¹⁰⁶ Gérard Lenne, *Le cinéma fantastique et ses mythologies* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1970), René Prédal, *Le cinéma fantastique* (Paris: Seghers, 1970), Jean-Marie Sabatier, *Les classiques du cinéma fantastique* (Paris: Editions Balland, 1973).

¹⁰⁷ Jean-Paul Török, "H Pictures" (II), In Ciment and Kardish, above cited, 67.

voyeurism and looking with sadism and murder and with the cinema.

Peeping Tom (1960) was the third of what David Pirie has called a "Sadian trilogy" of low-budget horror films produced by Nat Cohen's independent British studio Anglo-Amalgamated and whose forerunners were *Horrors of the Black Museum* (Arthur Crabtree, 1958) and *Circus of Horrors* (Sidney Hayers, 1960). As Peter Hutchings has noted, all three pictures used garish colour schemes, contemporary settings and drew heavily on the iconography of 1950s pornography. The cycle also contained repeated references to looking and shared an emphasis on gruesome acts of murder enacted on women.¹⁰⁸

Horrors of the Black Museum, the story of a crime writer who murders women in order to thrill his readership, featured a set of binoculars that snapped daggers into the eyes of a woman. *Circus of Horrors* told the story of a murderer who doubles as a plastic surgeon and circus owner, whilst *Peeping Tom* concerned a cameraman and pornographer who is also a sadistic serial killer and is compelled to film the death of his subjects and victims.

The fact that initial critical reactions to *Peeping Tom* in Britain were extremely hostile has been well documented. In particular the role played by British critics in rejecting the film on the grounds of its bad taste is now well charted.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps less systematically analysed have been the role these adverse reactions have played in the critical rehabilitation of *Peeping Tom* as emblematic of transgressive British cinema.

Peeping Tom was released in France exclusively at the Midi-Minuit, a cinema

¹⁰⁸ Peter Hutchings, *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 88-92.

¹⁰⁹ See Ian Christie, "The Scandal of *Peeping Tom*", in Ian Christie (ed.), *Powell, Pressburger and Others* (London: British Film Institute, 1978, 53-9.

that, as we have seen earlier, specialised in the fantastic and the erotic, and in the French context the fascination with *Peeping Tom* was far from universal. The film was more or less ignored by the mainstream press and, according to critic Jean-Paul Török in interview, who had seen the film in Winchester in a double-bill with Russ Meyer's *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1960),

Most critics completely ignored the film because they did not want to be associated with the Midi-Minuit which was a rather seedy cinema on the grands boulevards. It was a pornographic cinema, there were never any women at the Midi-Minuit, never.¹¹⁰

However, in some quarters, at a time when it had become a critical commonplace to view British cinema with contempt, *Peeping Tom* was received as a daring example of Surrealist poetry in film and was included in the surrealist pantheon as "the best analysis of fear, this great stimulator of the mind, liberator of the marvelous".¹¹¹ A few critics did review the film however. Released at the same time as Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), *Cahiers du cinéma* dismissed the film in a few derogatory lines:

A film of total platitude, yet with a script full of ideas, this is the challenge that has been upheld here. Oh yes the mise en scene is 'correct', I would even add that it is "clever", but I don't think I am conceding anything to Michael Powell; on the contrary, it only makes things worse.¹¹²

Michel Aubriant in *Paris-Presse* also judged the film "banal"¹¹³ but the most polemical article was Jacques Siclier's in the Catholic publication *Télérama*:

An aberrant and demented film [...] that, moreover accumulates the most disturbing and sadistic situations [...] One wonders who has the sickest

¹¹⁰ Appendix, interview with the author.

¹¹¹ Ado Kyrou, *Le Surréalisme au cinéma* (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1963), 89.

¹¹² Michel Delahaye, "Beau sujet gaché", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 113, November 1960, 61.

¹¹³ Michel Aubriant, "Le Voyeur", *Paris-Presse*, 30 September 1960.

brain, the character, the scriptwriter or the director.¹¹⁴

Naturally, because it was shown at the Midi-Minuit, *Peeping Tom* became the cult movie of the *Midi-Minuit fantastique* and *Positif* faction of film criticism, and director Michael Powell became a key figure of the "midi-minuiste" sensibility. Critic Jean-Paul Török wrote the first enthusiastic review of the film in *Positif* of November 1960:

A delicately nuanced psychological study of an authentic film auteur who pushes a particular conception of the direction of actors to its limits. For voyeurism alone is not enough to explain the character of Lewis; he is also, and at one and the same time, a sadistic filmmaker and murderer, with these different facets forming a coherent whole.¹¹⁵

In the polemical context of the early 1960s, the film provided a paradigmatic model in the construction of an oppositional canon against the "realist" aesthetic that was dominant. More importantly, the fact that *Peeping Tom* was shown exclusively in a male enclave, a site devoid of artistic and cultural value and on the margins of legitimate culture, ensured the film's transgressive status in relation to the mainstream (see Jean-Paul Török in appendix). In a direct line with a cultural posture tainted with dandyism where the height of refinement is to ostensibly distance oneself from the customary values of taste, especially those represented by *Cahiers du cinéma*, and at a time when pornography and eroticism were considered a direct challenge to the status quo, the film's representation of "cheap" culture such as pornography was seen as pushing the boundaries of taste and thus made it a pioneering film. It would therefore appear that the cult status of *Peeping Tom* was mostly acquired because it was

¹¹⁴ Jacques Siclier, "Abject!", *Télérama*, October 1960.

¹¹⁵ Jean-Paul Török, "Le Voyeur: Look at the Sea", *Positif*, 36, November 1960, translated in Christie, 1978, above cited, 60, emphasis in text.

despised or ignored by the critical establishment, while a few critics recognised that this was an exceptional film where "certain moments achieve a quite extraordinary sort of black poetry".¹¹⁶

Critical accounts of *Peeping Tom* mostly concentrated on issues of sadism and voyeurism. The linkage between voyeurism and sadism in the film tapped into the Freudian-inflected psychosexual concerns of the surrealists such as the battle between Eros and Thanatos, as well as their fascination with the Marquis de Sade: "worthy of note too is the care with which the sado-masochistic element in voyeurism is made explicit".¹¹⁷ Moreover, the film's self-reflexive aspect and the connection it drew between Mark Lewis' morbid desire to gaze, his scopophilia, and the way in which cinema appeals to a male voyeuristic instinct made it a cinephile film *par excellence*.

Peeping Tom's cult reputation was reinforced throughout the 1960s by continued exposure in *Midi-Minuit fantastique*. The interest expressed in British horror in this journal resulted in the publication in January 1964 of a special issue devoted to "Eroticism and horror in English cinema" where most of the emphasis was given to *Peeping Tom*.¹¹⁸ Referring to Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror* (a poem which looks back to Gothic horror and fantasy and the cruelty of Sade and was honoured by the Surrealists as a spiritual begetter), critic Michel Caen described the film as a masterpiece of the fantastic:

¹¹⁶ Jean-Paul Török, above cited, in Christie, 61.

¹¹⁷ Jean-Paul Török, *ibid*.

¹¹⁸ Jean-Claude Romer, "Lady Godiva and *Peeping Tom*", 1-2, Raymond Lefèvre, "*Le Voyeur*", 3-11, Michel Caen, "Les milles yeux du docteur Lewis", 12-5, "*Le Voyeur et la critique*", 16-7.

Peeping Tom fortunately avoids the pitfalls of neo-realism. In effect there is no place for pity and for the nauseating sensibility that once made the glory of a certain Italian school [...] *Peeping Tom* offers great moments of black poetry and horror such as the cinema has rarely offered us [...] I do feel really sorry for those who are not sensitive to the sometimes 'maldorian' and furious sensibility which is brought out in this masterpiece.¹¹⁹

The following year, *Midi-Minuit fantastique* 13, featured a conversation between critics Bernard Eisenschitz and Bertrand Tavernier with Michael Powell and *Peeping Tom* scriptwriter Leo Marks while in issue 20 of October 1968, *Midi-Minuit fantastique* produced yet another dossier on *Peeping Tom*, this time featuring a full-length interview of Michael Powell by Bertrand Tavernier and Jacques Prayer. This issue also featured a photograph of Powell with the respected French director Jean-Pierre Melville. The issue was complemented by a filmography, 19 photographic stills and a critical exegesis of *Peeping Tom* by Raymond Lefèvre:

Masterpiece of the horror film. Jewel of delirium, lucidity and sadism. The fantastic of the everyday. The one that shows us that none is shielded from disturbing fantasies, even those who look apparently normal.¹²⁰

Throughout the 1960s, *Midi-Minuit fantastique* campaigned to promote *Peeping Tom* as a paradigmatic example of its own conception of cinema and as an emblem of its alternative pantheon. In 1964, the journal sponsored the creation of a cine-club in Lyon entitled "Midi-Minuit II", exclusively dedicated to the fantastic, which, unsurprisingly in view of the history discussed above, opened with *Peeping Tom*. In 1965, Le Dragon, a first-run Parisian cinema

¹¹⁹ Michel Caen, "Les milles yeux du docteur Lewis", *Midi-Minuit fantastique*, 8, January 1964, 13.

¹²⁰ Raymond Lefèvre, "Du voyeurisme à l'infini", *Midi-Minuit fantastique*, 20, October 1968, 14-17.

started the "Premier congrès international de l'abominable" festival, presenting a selection of ten films picked by *Midi-Minuit fantastique* critic Jean-Claude Rohmer with *Peeping Tom* amongst them. According to publisher Eric Losfeld, if *Peeping Tom* became more widely recognised it was the result of their relentless promotion of the film:

The issue on British cinema is of crucial historical importance: *MMf* established *Peeping Tom* in film societies, the art house circuit and cine-clubs; because of us this brilliant film instantly became the major film of the fantastic [...] Cartesian criticism without lyricism or poetry can have its value but it was not OUR conception of film criticism at the time.¹²¹

Within this counter-cultural canon, Michael Powell was also gradually constructed as a maverick *auteur* and *cinéaste maudit*. Although the underground reputation of *Peeping Tom* was coming to light and becoming known, to this generation of critics, Powell was still a virtually unknown director. However, Bertrand Tavernier, after travelling to London had "discovered" four other films by Powell (and Pressburger): *Gone to Earth* (*La Renarde*), *Black Narcissus* (*Le Narcisse noir*), *I Know Where I'm Going!* (*Je sais où je vais*) and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (*La vie et la mort du colonel Blimp*). To Tavernier, this was the proof that *Peeping Tom* was not an oddity and he reported in *Fiction*, a journal dedicated to science-fiction and fantasy literature, that the films were undeniable masterpieces which proved that "the link that exists in Powell's works is astounding and reveals, far removed from traditional British cinema, the mark of a true *auteur*".¹²²

Michael Powell's reputation as a maverick was consolidated throughout the

¹²¹ Éric Losfeld, interview with René Prédal, in René Prédal, *Étude analytique et sémiologique de Midi-Minuit fantastique* (Nice: Centre du Vingtième Siècle, 1970), 479-80, emphasis in text.

¹²² Bertrand Tavernier, "Lettre d'Angleterre", *Fiction*, 180, December 1968:139-140.

1970s and was relayed by other journals such as *La Revue du cinéma/Image et Son* with the publication of a full dossier, signed Roland Lacourbe, on the director's work in 1971.¹²³ Raymond Lefèvre and Roland Lacourbe also conducted several substantial interviews with Powell during the course of the 1970s which allowed the director to comment on his work, and in 1980 the shooting script of *A Matter of Life and Death* was published by *L'Avant-scène du cinéma* with an article by Roland Lacourbe on the film's connection to Surrealism.¹²⁴

The re-release of *Peeping Tom* in 1976 showed the versatility of film critics; those who had attacked the film in 1960, now praised it to the skies.¹²⁵ This sustained French interest for a British director culminated with a combined homage to Michael Powell at the "Troisièmes rencontres de Saint-Etienne" festival in January and February 1981 and with the first Powell and Pressburger retrospective at the *Cinémathèque française* of February 1981. On this occasion, *Positif* published a three-part dossier¹²⁶ while in *Cahiers du cinéma* director Olivier Assayas conducted an interview with Powell.¹²⁷

¹²³ Roland Lacourbe, "Introduction à l'oeuvre de Michael Powell", *Image et Son*, June-July 1971, 23-45.

¹²⁴ Raymond Lefèvre and Roland Lacourbe, "Londres: rencontre avec Michael Powell", *Cinéma* 76, 216, 38-48, Roland Lacourbe, "Redécouvrir Michael Powell", *Écran* 79, 76, January 1979, 38-48, 77, February 1979, 24-40; Roland Lacourbe, "Les arcanes du surréalisme", *L'Avant-scène du cinéma*, 258, decembre 1980.

¹²⁵ Jacques Siclier, "Fantastique et perversion", *Le Monde*, 12 March 1992.

¹²⁶ Raymond Durgnat, "Aiming at the Archers", 239, February 1981, 23-33, Pierrette Gonzalez and Claude Guiguet, "Biofilmographie de Michael Powell", 240, March 1981, 19-31, Bertrand Tavernier, "Blimp, Powell, Pressburger ... et la poésie déguisée", Yann Tobin, "Post scriptum: le point du jour et les horizon perdus - notes complémentaires sur des films inconnus de Michael Powell", 241, April 1981, 23-25, 27-31.

¹²⁷ Olivier Assayas, "Redécouvrir Michael Powell: L'esprit du temps", *Cahiers du cinéma*, January 1981, 7-9, 10-9, 20-1. According to a conversation with Natacha Thiéry, organisor of the Michael Powell conference of June 2005 in Paris and author of a Ph.D thesis on Powell and Pressburger in the 1950s, Assayas has since disowned his infatuation with Powell as a "youthful mistake".

Conclusion

Midi-Minuit fantastique and *Positif* did significantly affect the contours of British cinema history in France. In the same way that Surrealism founded an *other* history of art and poetry, casting a different eye on the productions of the past, the British cinema constructed by critics for whom surrealism acted as a background was diametrically different from that of previous decades.

The romantic, fantastic side of British cinema gave these critics a cue to a fascinating kind of "Englishness" which was in stark contrast to that imagined by Truffaut and the New Wave.

If the stance towards the horror film was motivated by deploring such a lack in French cinema, for these critics, British horror was also considered worthy of critical attention as a polemical tool and for its association with oppositional taste. The kind of British cinema that captured the imagination of the neo-surrealists saw the earliest attempts to establish a critical appraisal of British cinema away from issues of realism (as with Bazin), authenticity, truth and social realism (as with Georges Sadoul) or the *politique des auteurs* (Truffaut and *Cahiers du cinéma*). In France, if Raymond Lefèvre and Roland Lacourbe were some of the first critics to rediscover Powell's work, they were also responsible for the first book-length publication in French dedicated to British cinema, *Trente ans de cinéma britannique*.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Paris: Éditions Cinéma 76, 1976.

Hence the film that transformed British cinema's reputation in France, *Peeping Tom*, emerged not from the British New Wave but from one of the most critically despised areas of production, the horror film. If horror was seriously examined as a distinctive and specific genre of British cinema, a close examination has revealed that the ensuing critical respectability of British cinema was also closely connected with the presence of an *auteur* such as Michael Powell. Although this is comprehensible in the case of *Peeping Tom*, produced without Emeric Pressburger, what this auteurist approach has generally overlooked is Powell's partnership with Emeric Pressburger. The legitimation of Michael Powell as an *auteur* through the film was thus symptomatic of the French critical tradition where *auteurs* are lionised as individuals who paradoxically achieve a level of national authenticity by rising above the determinations of their native cinema industries.

It has been suggested that the cult status bestowed upon *Peeping Tom* by this section of French critics was instrumental to the revaluation of British cinema. For Ian Christie, "the writings of Török, Tavernier, Lefèvre and Lacourbe were influential in conferring authority on what was still a sporadic process of personal discovery"¹²⁹, while Peter Hutchings has contended that *Peeping Tom* has played a key part in "the critical remapping of British cinema since the 1970s", a process which involved "the recovery of fantastic elements from the margins".¹³⁰ As Charles Barr has noted, the status of classic acquired by *Peeping Tom* marked a "deep change of attitude, not only with regards to

¹²⁹ Ian Christie, "Mirror Images: French Critical Reflections on British Cinema", *La Lettre de la Maison Française d'Oxford*, 11, 1999, 89.

¹³⁰ Peter Hutchings, above cited, 1998, 83.

Powell [...] but also in terms of British cinema more generally".¹³¹ Thus after a long period of neglect; in part under the influence of the prejudices of a certain section of French critics, there has been since the beginning of the 70s a renewal of interest and critical awareness of British cinema and a proliferation of books and articles on early cinema, British studios, genres, stars and audiences. Thus the film in which, as Ian Christie has noted, one can read a critique of the documentary tradition¹³², has become emblematic of what Julian Petley has labelled "The Lost Continent"¹³³, and film historians often evoke the violent reactions the film elicited on its release and the malaise of British critics faced with the work of Powell more generally to illustrate the determining way in which the recurrent taste for a cinema of surface realism has impeded the exegesis of British films with a poetic and allegorical dimension.¹³⁴ In this context, it is interesting to note that Raymond Durnat whose articles were at the forefront of the change of attitude towards Michael Powell is the only British critic to have adopted Surrealist values in the context of British film criticism; during the 60s Durnat regularly wrote for *Midi-Minuit fantastique*.¹³⁵

Nevertheless, as Paul Hammond has remarked, the collective endeavour of *L'Age du cinéma* and *Positif*, and, I would add, *Midi-Minuit fantastique* is "a

¹³¹ Charles Barr, "Une histoire personnelle typiquement British", in N.T. Binh and Philippe Pilard (eds.), *Typiquement British: Le cinéma britannique* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2000), 19.

¹³² Ian Christie, *Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* (London: Waterstone, 1985), 105.

¹³³ Julian Petley, in Barr, 1989, above cited, 98-119.

¹³⁴ Charles Barr, "Introduction: Amnesia and Schizophrenia", in Barr, 1989, above cited, 1-29.

¹³⁵ Raymond Durnat, "Lettre d'Angleterre", 7, September 1963, 73-9, "Lettre de Londres", 9, July 1964, 56, "Lettre de Londres", 10-11, Winter 1964-65, 89, "James Fleming contre Ian Bond ou *The Man with the Golden Arm*", 12, May 1965, 17, "Les premiers hommes dans la lune", 12, May 1965, 64, "Les Maléfices de la momie", 13, November 1965, 83, "En Angleterre occupée", 15-16, January 1967, 98, "Marat-Sade", 17, June 1967, 56.

body of work that, bar the enthusiasm of Ray Durnat has been more or less occluded from Anglo-Saxon scholarship".¹³⁶ This neglect can be ascribed, in part, to the emergence of a dominant critical discourse through André Bazin and the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics but also to the fact that *Positif* writers did not become filmmakers and refused to "classify, systematise, theorise."¹³⁷ Jim Hillier has asserted that one reason *Cahiers du cinéma* became so important and had such impact and influence was that "its relatively apolitical stance responded to broad currents in French, and British, cultural and political life during a period of crisis for liberal values".¹³⁸ In France, as Geneviève Sellier has noted, the lack of communication between aesthetics and politics allowed the dominant critical current to ignore political analyses against the New Wave, even when they were well constructed and argued.¹³⁹

However, as a more general interest in British cinema continued to gather momentum, the late 1980s and 1990s, saw a "return" of the political in French critical discourses, a return which involved a "rediscovery" and a critical remapping with emphasised the representation of the "social" and the "political" in certain contemporary British films. It is to the critical construction of British cinema during this period that the next chapter will turn.

¹³⁶ Hammond, above cited, 2000, 37.

¹³⁷ Thierry Frémaux, "L'aventure cinéphilique de *Positif* (1952-1989)", *Vingtième siècle, Revue d'histoire*, 23, July-September 1989, 26.

¹³⁸ Jim Hillier, above cited, 1985, 12.

¹³⁹ Geneviève Sellier, "Masculinity and Politics in New Wave Cinema", *Sites, The Journal of Contemporary French Studies*, vol. 4, Issue 2, Fall 2000, 474-5.

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Chapter Four:

The "Return of the Social": Ken Loach in the Pantheon

The subject of this final chapter is the emergence of a significant transformation in discursive constructions of British cinema by French critics in the late 1980s and 1990s, a turn-around marked by the extremely positive critical appraisal of committed British cinema. The 1990s saw a notable number of British films that drew their subject or subtext from the problems of unemployment and widening economic division and placed working-class characters at the centre of their narratives. These films were released at a time when the French cultural and political landscape was dominated by themes of exclusion identified by social commentators as the *fracture sociale* (social divide), yet at the same time French production appeared to be taken over by lavish productions and the tendency to shy away from "the real". The social and political concerns of some British films thus became markers of good cinema across the critical spectrum, especially the films of Ken Loach, a director, who in keeping with the French critical tradition was lionised as an *auteur*. In this chapter, I shall examine the reception of British cinema, and in particular the films of Ken Loach in the context of the debates and concerns which informed French film culture in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Each of the different historical moments that this research has examined so far has its own particular characteristics but as we have seen, two important sets of assumptions have inflected the critical reception of British cinema since the post-war period. The first set of assumptions is quite clearly linked to

notions of realism. The critical focus on *Brief Encounter* immediately after WWII and the concerns about authenticity and humanism that emerged more prominently in the late 1940s with André Bazin had led to critical applause for certain British films which had been read positively for the way in which they reflected on the mores of the national culture. Since the critical "revolution" of the 1950s in French film criticism, however, the film *auteur* has often attracted the greatest attention and has conjured very definite meanings and associations in relation to British cinema. The second set of assumptions thus has to do with auteurism and the elevation of Alfred Hitchcock as a great artist working within the constraints of the Hollywood system of production. The discursive emphasis that drew on the concept of *mise-en-scène* to demonstrate the cultural status of cinema during the height of the *politique des auteurs*, had led to the demonisation of British cinema; its reputation now rested on the contradiction, in Truffaut's terms, "between the terms cinema and Britain". In his view, as we saw in chapter two, British cinema was non-existent because it had no *auteurs*, apart from Hitchcock, the exception that confirmed the rule.

While Truffaut's claim clearly became highly influential both in France and abroad, new developments in the critical construction of British cinema in the next decade offered a challenge to such long-standing assumptions. As I have documented in chapter three, the emergence of an alternative discourse on British cinema appeared within a specific cultural climate. This shift was inextricably linked with an exploration and validation of the non-realist tradition in cinema and to debates and struggles within French cinephilia which in turn shaped and influenced the passionate and cultish celebration of *Peeping Tom* with director Michael Powell as the main focus of attention. The

subsequent publication of several books concerned with British film pointed to a growing interest that steadily developed from the late 1970s, as marginal practices of cinephile consumption and appropriation gradually crossed over to the mainstream, a trend that was to culminate in 1996 when the first substantial history of British film in French language, *Histoire du cinéma britannique*, was published.¹

Consequently, since British cinema had previously been a neglected field in comparison with other major national cinemas, all these new publications grappled with the problem of identifying its national specificity. Before moving on to French film criticism in the 1990s and its reading of British cinema, it is worth pausing briefly on these French-speaking histories of British cinema. Book-length publications on British cinema first appeared in 1967 with Belgian critic Jacques Belmans *Le Jeune cinéma anglais*² a pamphlet that placed an inordinate emphasis on Free Cinema and the British New Wave and praised the social criticism enacted in these works. It is significant that this study was published by *Premier Plan* (1959-1970), based in Lyon and edited by *Positif* editor Bernard Chardère (in his foreword to the book Chardère took again the opportunity to dismiss the French New Wave).³ However, the publication that many scholars have seen as having the most impact and as the origins of the rethinking of British cinema was *Trente ans de cinéma britannique*, written jointly by René Lacourbe and Roland Lefèvre in 1976. In a "dictionary" format, this book offered an auteur-based thematic and

¹ Philippe Pilard, *Histoire du cinéma britannique* (Paris: Editions Nathan, 1996).

² Jacques Belmans, "Jeune cinéma anglais", *Premier Plan*, 44 (Lyon: S.E.R.D.O.C, 1967).

³ Bernard Chardère, in Belmans, above cited, 3.

stylistic analysis of British directors and their films where the authors placed realism at the centre of their definition of British cinema; "to talk about English cinema", they observed, meant,

To let oneself be submerged by a multitude of stirring images; grey or colourful, humoristic or fantastic, grave or deadpan [...] Around the beauties of realism, the backbone of the whole history of English cinema, come to crystallise the many facets of a spectacular cinema.⁴

The model of British cinema developed by these publications was taken up the following year when a more historically orientated study appeared that dealt exclusively with the documentary-realist tradition.⁵ This renewed attention must be considered within the broader cultural context in which British cinema was critically received and understood at the time. Although these publications stemmed from a section of cinephilia which had close links with *Positif*, which, as we have seen, saw itself as socially and politically committed (and anti-clerical), the importance of the *auteur* as working against the mainstream dominant cinema also reflected the increased politicisation of French film culture in the mid to late 1960s and 1970s, and the influence of Marxist thoughts and politics in the emergence of radical cultural analysis. Thus, in 1978, yet another publication appeared, *Cinéma anglais autour de Kubrick et Losey* where Freddy Buache (director of the *Cinémathèque Suisse* and former *Positif* and *Premier Plan* editor) clearly took inspiration from the Marxist theory of ideology and Freudianism which profoundly informed

⁴ René Lacourbe and Raymond Lefèvre, *Trente ans de cinéma britannique* (Paris: Cinéma 76), 11.

⁵ In their *Le cinéma britannique, la tradition documentaire*, published in 1977, Olivier Barrot, Philippe Pilard and Jean Queval, following a method derived from art and literary history which privileges "moments" in national cinema, argued that the British documentary movement was a "school" which presented "a kind of model well ahead of the French cinema", see Pierre Lherminier, "Pour rêver d'un cinéma réel", 7.

cultural analysis during this period. Accordingly, Buache located the significance of British cinema in the figures of canonical *auteurs* with progressive credentials who stood against the "conservative" ideology of entertainment. For Buache, whilst British cinema consisted mostly of "great commercial successes (the James Bond series, for instance) that reproduced a hateful ideology and a complacency inspired by the mythologies of a bullish neo-capitalism (hedonism, selfishness, abject racism, ruthless ambition and a policing conception of life)", British cinema's value resided in the work of politically committed *auteurs* such as Stanley Kubrick, Joseph Losey, Ken Loach and Ken Russell who offered "a scathing critique of the system".⁶

It is significant that the peculiar status and singular national identity of British cinema thus defined through maverick personalities working against the system was then echoed in Philippe Pilard's 1989 overview of British filmmaking during the Thatcher years, a historical moment that viewed from France, then experiencing a return of the Left in power with the election of François Mitterrand in 1981, was often considered as an appalling form of laissez-faire liberalism:

On the one hand a cinema turned towards the real, often following in the documentary tradition of Grierson and Free Cinema [...] On the other, eccentrics, mavericks and visionaries.⁷

Although Surrealism never completely vanished at *Positif*⁸ and the continuing impact of *Midi Minuit fantastique* can be seen in the magazines *L'Ecran fantastique* (1969) and *Mad Movies* (1972), the 1980s and 1990s were marked

⁶ Freddy Buache, *Cinéma anglais autour de Kubrick et Losey* (Lausanne: l'Âge d'Homme, 1979), 8.

⁷ Philippe Pilard, *Le nouveau cinéma britannique* (Paris: Cinq Continents Hatier, 1989), 17.

⁸ See for instance the special issue "Sexe & érotisme", *Positif*, 521-522, July/August 2004.

by the relative absence of critical practices overtly inflected by surrealism (while surrealist thought had fed into the political activism of the events of May 1968, the movement had been disbanded in 1967, a year after the death of Breton).

If at the end of the twentieth century no group or tendency seems to have a monopoly on the discourse around film, the cumulative impact of France's highly developed cinephile culture and the long struggle by cinephiles and intellectuals to install cinema as the art of the twentieth century has resulted, as François de la Bretèque has suggested, in "cinema now playing a key role in socio-political debates", even to the extent that "comment on film may replace discussion of the social issues to which they relate". As a consequence of the importance of cinema in the French social imaginary, according to de la Bretèque, "questions of ethics in relation to the image and its use, and the responsibility of those who create it, have taken henceforth a major part place in the realm of ideas and intellectual debate".⁹

Thus we can see that as studies of British cinema flourished in France, the association of British film with documentary realism and social commitment slowly became hegemonic in the sense that any discussion of British cinema in general included at least some reflection on realism, Free Cinema, John Grierson or the G.P.O Film Unit which had been the focus of a retrospective at the *Cinémathèque française* in 1966.¹⁰ Although new critiques of conventional British film history were beginning to appear in Britain during the late 1970s

⁹ François de la Bretèque, "Le cinéma, les intellectuels, l'engagement sur la scène publique: le syndrome de la sorcière", *Les Cahiers de la Cinémathèque*, 70, October 1999, 3.

¹⁰ See *Hommage au G.P.O Film Unit* (Paris: Cinémathèque française, 1966).

and 1980s¹¹, it is clear that the French historians of British cinema were influenced by British historians of British cinema which had tended, as British film historian Charles Barr and several others have noted, to assign the respectable and "worthy" tradition of British cinema to the realist aesthetic.¹²

Thus, it must be noted that following the presentation of Ken Loach's *Kes* at Cannes in 1970, a number of British films, notably the small-scale works which had been supported by the British Film Institute Production Board, were singled out and perceived as signifying the imminent emergence of a new British New Wave following in the footsteps of Free Cinema. The first two instalments of the Bill Douglas trilogy, *My Childhood* (1972) and *My Ain Folk* (1973) were released together in Paris under the title of *Enfance*¹³ and Barney Platts-Mills' *Bronco Bullfrog* (1969) was also presented during *La semaine de la critique* at Cannes. Whilst *Kes* was widely compared with Truffaut's *Les quatre cent coups* (1959) and generally considered more daring a film in *Positif*, Ken Loach was also credited as indicating this renewal of the British social realist tradition. As one critic observed, *Kes* was "the bird that announced the renewal of a deep tendency in British cinema, namely realism, of which *Free Cinema* had been the most noteworthy".¹⁴

Interestingly, in France, critical studies of British cinema also coincided with a renewal of scholarly interest in British history and civilisation. In his

¹¹ For instance Charles Barr, *Ealing Studios* (London: Cameron & Tayleur, 1977), James Curran and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983).

¹² Charles Barr, "Introduction: Amnesia and Schizophrenia", in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), pp. 1-29, and Julian Petley, "The Lost Continent", in Barr (ed.), above cited, 98-119.

¹³ See Jean-Paul Török, "Village of the damned", *Positif*, 176, December 1975, 66-8.

¹⁴ "Bronco Bullfrog", *Positif*, 130, September 1971, 15.

introduction to *Histoire de l'Angleterre: des origines à nos jours*¹⁵, the historian Philippe Chassaing argues that in contrast with previous periods when very few studies dealing with British civilisation, language and culture had been undertaken, during the 1970s French scholarship began to pay more attention to British history. This renewal of interest in Britain may have been a legacy of the "Swinging Sixties" when there was a perception in Europe that British society, led by youth popular culture, had become more liberated. Although these developments were perhaps not felt in the wider culture, as Jacques Darras was able to write regretfully in the intellectual journal *Esprit* in 1985 "it is not just that England does not haunt us. It leaves us cold. We've never known her."¹⁶ We can nonetheless see that in film history terms, this renewed scholarly interest, could be said to have paved the way for the canonisation of Ken Loach.

By the end of the 1990s this interest had spawned a wide range of film reviews, publications, festivals, retrospectives and homages with the creation in 1984 of a yearly *Festival des cinémas d'Irlande et de Grande-Bretagne* at Cherbourg, a *Festival du film britannique* at Dinard in 1989, a *Festival des Ecrans Britanniques* at Nîmes and a major retrospective at the *Cinémathèque Française* between February 1988 and January 1989 entitled *Découverte et sauvegarde du cinéma britannique*.¹⁷ Notable among all these was the *Typiquement British* six-months retrospective at the Pompidou Centre between

¹⁵ Philippe Chassaing, *Histoire de l'Angleterre des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Champs Flammarion, 2001), 8.

¹⁶ Jacques Darras, "La voie royale de l'imaginaire", *Esprit*, 103, July 1985, 5.

¹⁷ See the accompanying publication, Barbara Dent and Michelle Snapes (eds.), *Découverte et sauvegarde du cinéma britannique* (Paris: Cinémathèque française, 1988).

4th October 2000 and 5th March 2001, an unprecedented tribute to British cinema that can be read both as a challenge to long-held prejudices as well as suggesting that perhaps it was the British rather than the French that were disregarding British cinema.¹⁸ Before investigating the emergence of a new image of British cinema in France and examining the critical reception of the cinema of Ken Loach, I will now provide an account of recent developments in French film criticism and cinephilia.

French Film Criticism in the 1990s: an Overview

During the 1990s, according to Frédéric Bonnaud of *Les Inrockuptibles*, a weekly television listings magazine created in 1986 and which covers mainly music but also cinema and the arts,

There developed a perception that there exists in France a 'triangulation' of film-critical influence between *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Le Monde* and the left-leaning daily *Libération*, in which the tradition of cinephile-criticism inaugurated by *Cahiers* continues. It's a triangulation in fact that should be extended to include the other nodal point of *Les Inrockuptibles* itself.¹⁹

This so-called "Bermuda Triangle" of French film criticism was actually a term devised by *Positif* editor Michel Ciment in an attack on a network of critics, what he called "the pressure group which has its basic axis in *Cahiers*

¹⁸ Stuart Jeffries, "The British are coming", *The Guardian*, 6 October 2000, 10-1.

¹⁹ Bonnaud quoted in Chris Darke, "Catching up with *Cahiers*", *Film Comment*, Sept-Oct 2001, 37. According to Laurent Jullier, the influence of the group critics that form what is known as the *Triangle des Bermudes* goes well beyond these periodicals. See Laurent Jullier, *Qu'est-ce qu'un bon film?* (Paris: La Dispute, 2002). It also showed during *L'affaire Leconte* when, between October and December 1999, some filmmakers such as Patrice Leconte and Bertrand Tavernier accused these critics of persistently undermining French commercial and popular filmmaking.

du Cinéma - Libération as initiated by Serge Daney [...] the *Inrockuptibles* and now *Le Monde* thus transforming the axis into a "Bermuda quadrangle".²⁰ With this typical polemic, Ciment accused what he saw as the dominant "dogma" represented by these magazines, newspapers and their film critics of being a "church" whose "religious conformism prevents its faithful ever to question The Tables of the Law".²¹ This "church", according to Ciment, was still blindly following the *politique des auteurs* and the Bazinian legacy of *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s and included in its tenets, following Truffaut and Godard, the on-going traditional dismissal of British cinema.²² As we have seen, there has been a long-standing rivalry between *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif*. But although there seems to be nowadays less of a heated debate and it seems that the subjects of conflict are less clear-cut, the distinctive critical approaches of the two camps arguably still come into light in their diametrically opposed conceptions of, and attitudes to, British cinema. As we will see in a later section of this chapter, British cinema can still be said to provide both journals with a crucial means of critical self-definition, especially as French cinephilia has been increasingly haunted by the nostalgia of a golden age and the certainty of an end to the "old" or "classical" cinephilia of the 1950s and early 1960s. In *Feux croisés sur la critique*, an anthology of interviews with French film critics, of whom notably only one is a woman (Claude-Marie Trémois), it appears that most practising critics belong to the generation that discovered cinema at the *Cinémathèque française* but also towards the end of the ciné-

²⁰ Michel Ciment, "Du pré carré au triangle des Bermudes ou les ravages de la pensée unique", *Positif*, 440, October 1997, 74-8.

²¹ Ciment, above cited, 76.

²² Ciment, *ibid.*

clubs movement which disappeared around the mid-1960s.²³ It is also interesting to note that André Bazin is invoked by nearly all as a major formative influence and that most of these critics also reflect nostalgically on the passing of a certain type of cinephilia. The changes in consciousness and cultural practice in the post-1968 era have been characterised negatively as a break-down of cinephilia, notably with the development of television and the fragmentation of the audience. As Antoine de Baecque put it, the demise of classical cinephilia can be dated to 1968 onwards, when "for some classical cinephilia is admittedly still a refuge but from then on, it is lived nostalgically or with melancholy - the death of cinema".²⁴

At the turn of the 21st century, *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif* can be said to represent the last bastions of the "classical" era of cinephilia, as French cinephilia has become increasingly fragmented into as many cinephilias as there are audiences. In a dossier on the state of French film culture in this new cultural environment, Jean-Claude Loiseau has described "classical" cinephilia as a historical moment when "film criticism was characterised by critical battles around American cinema, the French New Wave, the *politique des auteurs*". Loiseau also notes the nostalgia and the melancholy involved in remembering this "golden classical age":

The older generation still recalls these fierce battles, dogma against dogma, with emotion, but then all was settled on common ground. Nowadays, the cinephile community has fragmented into pieces [...] In the end, what could unite these many cinephilias has become negligible. Look at the crisis at *Cahiers du cinéma* and of any critical discourse

²³ Jean-François Houben, *Feux croisés sur la critique. Dix sept entretiens* (Paris: Cerf Collection 7e Art, 1999).

²⁴ Antoine de Baecque, *La cinéphilie: Invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture* (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 364.

which is neither able to link all the different cinephilias together nor able to found the legitimacy of a shared or even contested taste [...] It is as if cinephilia had ceased to be a struggle aiming to establish hierarchies - who is an *auteur*, who isn't? - to become, first and foremost, an affirmation of differences: to each his passion, according to his own taste and personal culture.²⁵

In the 1990s, due to the impact of the changing French audio-visual environment with recent developments in the home exhibition market such as television, video, DVD, the internet, Pay-per-view, home theatre and satellite delivery systems and other notable evolutions in home entertainment, a new diversified brand of cinephilia has been emerging where the general influence and prescriptive role of film criticism seems to have been waning. As Marijke de Valck and Malte Hegener have noted,

New technologies have enabled a new and more active kind of reception in which cinephiles encounter and discuss films in new settings which are increasingly gaining significance such as film festivals, late-night television, home entertainment centers, and internet groups [...] The tendency for contemporary cinephilia therefore is to move beyond the small and elitists communities of the 1950s - 70s and initiate new non-institutional practices (e.g., bootlegging) as well as new institutions (internet platforms, specialized audience festivals on horror, science fiction or fantasy).²⁶

While there is still a highly developed cinephile culture in France, this shift to a post-classical, diversified brand of cinephilia, has been marked by the appearance of more mainstream magazines since the late 1970s and 1980s such as *Première* (1976), and *Studio Magazine* (1987), aimed at the young cinephile community, while new ones have been launched catering for a more specialised niche audience such as *CinémAction* (1978), *Iris* (1983), *Vertigo*

²⁵ Jean-Claude Loiseau, "La vie rêvée des cinéphiles", *Télérama*, 2731, 18 May 2002, 33.

²⁶ Marijke de Valk and Malte Hagener, "Down with Cinephilia? Long Live Cinephilia? And Other Videosyncratic pleasures", in Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (eds.), *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 20, 21.

(1987), *Trafic* (1991), *Cinergon* (1995), *HK Orient Extrême Cinema* (1996), *Repérages* (1998) and *Synopsis* (1998) amongst others. However, an important magazine that offers regular sections on cinema and exhaustive film reviews is the weekly television listing magazine *Télérama*, owned by the daily newspaper *Le Monde*. *Télérama* is a quality guide to cultural life and it can nowadays claim to be one of the leading cultural magazines of the educated classes.

Before exploring the critical construction of British cinema and the "social" dimension read in British films in the 1990s and in particular the canonisation of Ken Loach, it now seems appropriate to consider how certain changes in the economics of film production in Britain had an impact on its critical image. In this next section, I explore how the changed circumstances within which British films were circulated in France in the mid-1990s helped raise new critical responses.

Revival and Appropriation: British Cinema in France in the 1990s.

There were several factors that contributed to the changing reputation, and the positive image British cinema would enjoy during this period. The shift towards a positive perception of British cinema first emerged in the late 1980s to early 1990s as specific developments in British film culture led to new sources of finance for film production with the setting up of Channel Four, a television channel with an interest in financing low-budget feature films. French scholar Philippe Pilard, a specialist on British cinema, has argued that

the release of the first wave of Channel Four financed films, films that "evoke a hard-headed assessment of contemporary Britain", marked a major turning-point and one of the first instances of a notable shift in the perception of British cinema in France.²⁷

It has been observed that the legacy of the "British New Wave" of the early 1960s was kept alive in television drama throughout the 1960s and 1970s and re-emerged in some of the films produced by Channel Four in the 1980s and 1990s. According to historian John Caughie: "the art television of the 1960s and 1970s is absorbed into the audiovisual space of the art cinema of the 1980s and 1990s".²⁸ As we will see many of the directors celebrated by French critics had started their careers on television. Thus a crucial cultural change occurred with the setting up of Channel Four in 1982 and a new formation of British art cinema in which we saw a greater convergence between certain areas of the film and television industries. This led to what Christopher Williams has called "the social art cinema"²⁹, the blending of the social concerns of British cinema and British television with some of the artistically self-conscious concerns of European art cinema. As John Hill has noted, this process was given impetus by Channel Four, since the channel "had a joint commitment to the support of a 'national cinema' (which would win prestige internationally by circulation as 'art') and to the fulfilment of a public service remit (which favoured a degree of

²⁷ Philippe Pilard, *Le Nouveau Cinéma Britannique 1979-1988* (Cinq Continents-Hatier: Renens, 1989), 26.

²⁸ John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism, and British culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 127.

²⁹ Christopher Williams, "The Social Art Cinema: A Moment in the History of British Film and Television Culture", in Christopher Williams (ed.), *Cinema: The Beginnings and the Future* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2000), 190-200.

engagement by cinema with matters of social concern)".³⁰ Although Arte, the Franco-German television network that aims to promote quality programming related to the arts and culture was launched in 1992, the notion of such a channel was then unthinkable in France where television and films were seen as mutually exclusive (such convergence would take place later with Canal Plus). As Serge Regourd has reflected in the context of audiovisual liberalisation in European countries during the 1980s, France and the U.K. have corresponded to two markedly distinct models: "a number of state regulatory structures and arrangements have been for the most part perpetuated or safeguarded in the U.K., at a time when political choices regarding television broadcasting in France have by contrast been shaped by a conspicuous commitment to 'privatisation'".³¹

The example of Channel 4 was thus highly symbolic of the contrast with the French system as a commercial channel that was also a "cultural channel" or a "minority channel."³² The involvement of Channel Four in film production had a considerable influence on the general perception of British cinema, especially in France where it was seen as a creatively innovative public service television, an "enlightened producer [...] privileging first films [...] leading an active *auteur* policy [...] encouraging independent film-makers".³³ Even though France had a much more generous film funding policy than the U.K., ironically, Channel Four was endowed by certain French critics with cultural

³⁰ John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 67.

³¹ Serge Regourd, "Two Conflicting Notions of Audiovisual Liberalisation", in Michael Scriven and Monia Lecomte (eds.), *Television Broadcasting in Contemporary France and Britain* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), 29.

³² Serge Regourd, above cited, 38.

³³ See Sandrine Sénéchal, "Channel Four, producteur de cinéma", *www.Lumière!.org*

prestige, perhaps even looked upon with envy, acquiring a reputation for funding low-budget "independent" and quirky films, giving an eclectic mix of directors the opportunity to develop their work. As a result it was often credited with initiating yet another "new wave" of British films.³⁴ Concomitant with the centrality of the *auteur*, the focus on humour and the depiction of contemporary subject matter were key to the positive appreciation of these productions. The cultural originality located in Channel Four generated a vogue for small-scale British films that were admired for their quirky humour and their readiness to look sharply at modern society. As Philippe Pilard put it: "Humour and social observation: viewed from France these are two typically British qualities".³⁵

In this context, by first signalling the new image of a national cinema that would come into sharp focus in the next decade, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, 1985) was a significant film. Notwithstanding the fact that its origins as a television film and shot on 16mm confused some critics³⁶, the film was extremely well received on its French theatrical release in September 1986. As the daily *Libération* put it then,

For once, it is from British cinema, more noted these last few for its academic puddings or grim social enquiries, that comes the most lively comedy we have seen in years.³⁷

My Beautiful Laundrette was read as "deliciously Marxist" by Françoise Audé in *Positif*³⁸, as "charming and very English in its elegant and coldly accurate

³⁴ See for instance Yves Allion, "Cinéma anglais, la relève de la garde", *La Revue du cinéma*, 439, June 1988, 45-52.

³⁵ Phillipe Pilard, above cited, 107.

³⁶ See Iannis Katsahnias, "Happy Hour", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 395-396, May 1987, 60-67.

³⁷ Louella Interim, "Lave Story", *Libération*, 6 October 1986, 29.

³⁸ "[...] un film délicieusement marxiste", Françoise Audé, "My Beautiful Launderette: another

realism" in *Le Monde*.³⁹ In addition, Hanif Kureishi's script was widely admired and commented upon and the playwright featured in several reviews. The value of the film in critical terms, however, was closely linked to its director Stephen Frears. Paraphrasing the Bazin quote from the opening of *Le Mépris* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963), *Cahiers du cinéma* enthused that although the film was concerned with social issues, Frears' direction was "magnificent" and "the perfect illustration of Bazin's formulation that 'cinema substitutes for our gaze a world more in harmony with our desires'".⁴⁰ Frears was also eulogised in *Positif*, first by Françoise Audé (quoted above) and then by Stéphane Brisset who thought his work (both in film and television) as displaying an "unfailing continuity and thematic conciseness; his point of view is that of an *auteur*".⁴¹

As the 1990s wore on, due to the unprecedented quantitative presence of British films distributed in France, British cinema received increasingly widespread media attention that peaked in the middle of the decade. *My Beautiful Laundrette* was closely followed by the release of *Prick Up Your Ears* (1987) and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987) a series of films consequently described as the director's London trilogy.⁴² Frears' foray into literary adaptation with his Hollywood debut, *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988) was also critically applauded and received a Best Foreign Film César award in 1990. More recently, Frears' return to Britain after a spell in Hollywood, has

future? *Positif*, 308, October 1986, 64.

³⁹ Colette Godard, "Le "Beur" de Londres, *Le Monde*, 5 September 1986.

⁴⁰ Iannis Katsahnias, "D'amour et de barbarie", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 387, September 1986, 55-56.

⁴¹ Stéphane Brisset, "La télévision de Stephen Frears", *Positif*, 338, April, 1989, 11.

⁴² Eithne O'Neill, *Stephen Frears* (Paris: Rivages/Cinéma, 1994).

led some critics to comparisons with Alfred Hitchcock and *Dirty Pretty Things*, a thriller produced by the BBC and released in France in September 2003, as his own *Frenzy* (Hitchcock, 1972).⁴³

If British films, as Ian Christie has noted, had a difficult time finding their way to domestic audiences in the U.K. due to the vagaries of distribution and exhibition and the competition exerted by Hollywood blockbusters⁴⁴, they were widely released in France and attracted widespread notice. Like Christie, French reviewers noted that

The success of English cinema is striking in French cinemas where it has found an audience, more or less popular or cinephile depending on the films, to appreciate *Shallow Grave* (30th at the French box office in 1995), *Secrets and Lies* (23rd in 1996), *Brassed Off* or *The Full Monty* in 1997.⁴⁵

This phenomenon coincided with an economic and cultural moment in which British film-making enjoyed yet another renaissance, helped (from 1995 onwards) by a new source of public funding for film production with the proceeds of the National Lottery and the ongoing role of Channel Four, the BBC and British Screen. In contrast with the end of the 1980s when production numbers had slumped (in 1989, for instance only 30 films were produced), the number of features produced rose to 128 in 1996. The year 1993 was marked by the particularly strong presence of British cinema at the Cannes film festival with several British films of which four were produced or co-produced by Channel Four presented in competition: *Raining Stones* (Ken Loach, 1993),

⁴³ Vincent Ostria, "Les ombres de Londres", *Les Inrockuptibles*, 3 September 2003, 58-9.

⁴⁴ Ian Christie, "As Others See Us: British Filmmaking and Europe in the 1990s", in Robert Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema in the 1990s* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 68-79.

⁴⁵ Régine Chaniac and Jean-Pierre Jézéquel, *Télévision et cinéma, le désenchantement* (Paris: Nathan, 1998), 169.

Naked (Mike Leigh, 1993), *Friends* (Helen Proctor, 1993) and *The Baby of Macon* (Peter Greenaway, 1993), as well as Stephen Frears's *The Snapper* (1993) produced by the BBC. Cannes is a highly public site for the production of discursive value and the media impact was immediate. As *Télérama* put it in 1996, "By Jove, what a come-back!"⁴⁶ The Cannes festival was a highly significant event and one of its effects was to open British cinema to a wider French public.⁴⁷ However, while the initial response was one of discovery and press reports hailed the renaissance of British cinema in general, it was the films of Stephen Frears, Mike Leigh and Kenneth Loach that made the headlines when *Naked* won the Director's prize and the prize for Best Actor while *Raining Stones* received the Jury Prize (the third time Ken Loach won a prize at Cannes). Thus according to *Télérama*, British cinema was "alive and well; Stephen Frears, Mike Leigh and Ken Loach prove it and with style"⁴⁸ whilst *Première* headlined, "Grande-Bretagne, the lions are out".⁴⁹ The specifically national character of these films was put forward and their national characteristics highlighted in terms of realism: "*Raining Stones* by Ken Loach. In the mist of all the Cannes pomp, a British, social and realist film".⁵⁰

The peak of critical approbation that the success of *Naked*, *Raining Stones* and *The Snapper* signalled was confirmed and the renaissance of British cinema became official two years later when Mike Leigh's *Secrets and Lies*

⁴⁶ "L'explosion du cinéma anglais, Ewan McGregor, coqueluche de la nouvelle vague", dossier on British cinema, *Télérama*, 2447, 7 Decembre 1996, 36-46.

⁴⁷ By January 1994, *Naked* had been seen by 75, 000, *Raining Stones* by 170, 000 and *The Snapper* by 230, 000, *Le Film Français*, 21 January 1994, 3.

⁴⁸ Claude-Marie Trémois, "Les trois anglais et le continent", *Télérama*, 2263, 26 May 1993, 36.

⁴⁹ *Première*, 2902, June 1993, 96-99.

⁵⁰ *Studio*, 74, special Cannes, May 1993, 46.

won the *Golden Palm* at the 1995 festival. From then on, Frears, Leigh and Loach were perceived as emblematic figures of British cinema, refurbishing the critical pantheon with new *auteurs*.⁵¹ The national specificity that was perceived to be refracted by these directors' relationship to previous traditions of British social realism corresponded to French critical expectations of British cinema. Each of their films, in its own way, would come to be perceived as representative of the corpus of "good" British cinema through the privileged genre of British "realism", or rather its British specificity, "social realism":

The anti-authoritarian rage of thirty years ago endures with Leigh and Loach, in contrast to its clearly superficial or occasional manifestation in so many French and Italian directors of the same generation. It proves, moreover, that working on low budgets for television (the prestigious Channel Four; without equal in the world), does not mean this sort of spirit has to be cut short.⁵²

Interestingly, whilst Cannes was celebrating "small" British films, Hollywood was giving its acclaim to large mainstream productions such as the David Putnam produced *Chariots of Fire* (Hugh Hudson, 1982) that won four Academy Awards, including best picture; a recognition that led director Colin Welland famously to declare "The British are coming!" As Andrew Higson has pointed out in his discussion of the concept of "national cinema", assumptions of coherence, unity and cultural specificity form part of a mythologizing process and "the concept has almost invariably been mobilised as a strategy of cultural (and economic) resistance: a means of asserting national autonomy in

⁵¹ See Eithne O'Neill, *Stephen Frears* (Paris: Rivages/Cinéma, 1994), Gilles Laprèvoite, *Mike Leigh* (Amiens: Trois Cailloux, 1993), Ken Loach: *Une dramaturgie de l'engagement* (Nice: Cinémathèque de Nice, 2001), Francis Rousselet, *Ken Loach: Un rebelle* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2002), Erika Thomas, *L'univers de Ken Loach: Engagement politique et rencontre amoureuse* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2004), Erika Thomas, *Le cinéma de Ken Loach: misères de l'identité professionnelle* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2005).

⁵² L.C., "Raining Stones", *Positif*, 389-390, July-August 1993, p. 54.

the face of (usually) Hollywood's international domination."⁵³ It is thus also clear that those French critics who championed a particular vision of British cinema did so as an instinctive anti-Hollywood reaction, in the context of the GATT affair of 1993 and the dispute over the cultural exception between the French cinema and Hollywood.⁵⁴ The French preoccupation has consistently been to nurture a distinctively national cinema, whilst it seems that in Britain in the face of a lack of government support for the film industry, and with the common language, a frequent producer-led approach has been to beat the Americans at their own game. As David Putnam has noted the two film industries gradually came to define the two poles of the European response to Hollywood.⁵⁵ It is significant, though, that it was the figure of Ken Loach, whose critical recognition took place to a great extent in Europe and in particular in France, that encapsulated the view of the European *auteur* resisting against the American onslaught. The critical success of a certain British cinema with Ken Loach as its figurehead, represented a complete break from the view of British cinema as a cinema of American-financed blockbusters, exemplified for French critics by the success of the James Bond films (for instance Buache quoted above).

The large amount of critical attention devoted to small-scale directors who work within the British naturalist tradition and to the cycle of working-class films of the 1990s went hand in hand with the ignorance of popular genres

⁵³ Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema", *Screen*, 30, 4, Autumn 1989, 37.

⁵⁴ On this see Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, "From the Blum-Byrnes Agreement to the GATT Affair", in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Steve Ricci (eds.), *Hollywood and Europe: Economics, Culture, National Identity* (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 47-60.

⁵⁵ See David Putnam, *The Undeclared War* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), 255.

such as the flourishing heritage genre which were given scarce critical attention, contrary to the lively debate heritage film provoked in the U.K. Indeed, the focus around social realist cinema and small-scale *auteur* films as a specific instance of "national" cinema and the lack of engagement of French critics with the heritage film is hardly surprising. First of all, as Claire Monk has pointed out, in the context of British cinema's subordination to Hollywood, "the "Britishness" or "Englishness" of such films is never, nor has ever been, a straightforward matter". Indeed, Monk also argues that "a case could be made that they have *characteristically* been products of international funding, migrancy or collaboration".⁵⁶ Secondly, the low cultural status of these texts within patriarchal society is tied to their status as popular and middlebrow cinema, and "heavily gendered in their appeal".⁵⁷ As critical debates proliferated around heritage film during the 1990s in Britain, the dismissal of the genre as conservative by some critics was contradicted by feminists and gay academics who discussed the films positively in terms of sexual and gender politics. This last point is highly relevant in the context of French film culture where the strong homosocial space of cinephilia as well as being traditionally gender-blind has also worked to exclude women.⁵⁸ Moreover, the display of "good taste" has historically been antithetical to the cinephile sense of distinction and to the predominantly male canon of good cinema. Also, as Ian Christie has pointed out in his discussion about canon-formation in film

⁵⁶ Claire Monk, "The British heritage-film debate revisited", in Claire Monk and Amy Sargeant (eds.), *British Historical Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002), 176-7, emphasis in text.

⁵⁷ Claire Monk, "The Heritage Film and Gendered Spectatorship", *Close-Up: The Electronic Journal of British Popular cinema*, 1 (1996-1997), at www.shu.ac.uk/services/lc/closeup/monk.htm.

⁵⁸ see Noël Burch, above cited.

studies,

The international canon [...] draws heavily from small *oeuvres* and disrupted careers [...] None of which is surprising, but it does exercise a conservative influence on programming and scholarship, which could otherwise exert more leverage for expansion and change.⁵⁹

Furthermore, it is also interesting to note the nostalgia that British social realist films of the 1990s deploy in their representation of masculinity and of the lost homosocial communities the old industries engendered. As Monk has noted, these films' strategies of "arousing of emotion around the idea of men as a community under threat" would seem "to explain the film's ability to appeal to an international male audience far broader and far more affluent than the 'underclass' depicted, with little personal investment in post-industrial traumas, and with no knowledge of the film's Northern English cultural and industrial setting".⁶⁰

We can see this idea unwittingly echoed in Jean-Michel Frodon's review of *Raining Stones* in *Le Monde*,

After *The Snapper* and *Naked* [...] *Raining Stones* represents the third side of this triangle of British cinema; a cinema that is perhaps unique nowadays: where else do they know how to show life when it goes wrong with such strength and warmth?⁶¹

Consequently, if there was one feature of the critical discourses on British cinema which emerged in France during this period that seems beyond dispute, it was the construction of British cinema in relation to the "social" but also as an instance of national cinema in its "difference" from mainstream British,

⁵⁹ Ian Christie, "Canon Fodder", *Sight and Sound*, 21, 8, December 1992, 33.

⁶⁰ Claire Monk, "Underbelly UK: The 1990s underclass film, masculinity and the ideologies of 'new' Britain", in Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (ed.), *British Cinema Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), 280.

⁶¹ Jean-Michel Frodon, "*Raining Stones* de Ken Loach. Miracle à Manchester", *Le Monde*, 25 May 1993, 14.

American and, I would add, French cinema of the period. In the case of Ken Loach, critical writings clearly focused on his status as an *auteur* and he was put on a pedestal: "Leigh, Frears, good. Indeed even very good. But the masterpiece, one more time we owe it to Ken Loach".⁶² The British director's critical currency rose dramatically in France and paradoxically, the reception of his films in France contrasted sharply with their reception in Britain. Whereas France came to be seen as an appreciative market for "worthy British films that no-one wants to see in Britain"⁶³, in the case of Ken Loach there also developed a sense that in Britain, his work was "less known and less appreciated than it should be."⁶⁴

A comparison can be made with other European art cinema movements. For instance, historian Thomas Elsaesser in his study of the reception of the New German Cinema abroad has argued that,

[The New German Cinema] was discovered and even invented abroad and it had to be imported to be recognised as such...[This provides] an instructive example of the powerful amplification effect that the media in the sphere of culture can command, when there is a market ready for it and a certain quantitative presence can translate itself into a qualitative judgement.⁶⁵

This attention, he claims, "created a number of internationally renowned filmmakers" and led to "'productive misreadings', in the sense of unifying the diversity and appropriating the films".⁶⁶

The 1990s thus produced a new critical representation of British cinema, the

⁶² Claude-Marie Trémois, *Télérama*, 2263, 26 May 1993, 36.

⁶³ Ian Christie: "As Others See Us: British Film-making and Europe in the 90s", in Robert Murphy (ed.), *British cinema of the 90s*, London: British Film Institute, 2000), 68-79.

⁶⁴ John Hill: "Every Fuckin' Choice Stinks", *Sight and Sound*, 8, 11, 1998, 18.

⁶⁵ Thomas Elsaesser, *The New German Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), 291.

⁶⁶ Thomas Elsaesser, above cited, 300.

public profile of which was captured in the name of Ken Loach, a filmmaker who had been discovered by French critics in the 1970s at Cannes with his fiction film *Poor Cow* (1967), but especially with *Kes* (1969) and *Family Life* (1971), a film that has enjoyed an enduring cult status with an older generation of cinephiles, through to *Black Jack* (1979), *The Gamekeeper* (1980) and *Looks and Smiles* (1981).

During the 1990s, his work generated a positive critical consensus across the spectrum, from *Première* and *Studio* to *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif*. As Philippe Pilard has noted, although his work for television is less known in France, "in the area of the "socially concerned" cinema Ken Loach is the filmmaker whose reputation is the best established in France. The older generation of cinephiles remember *Poor Cow*, *Kes* and *Family Life*. For the younger generation their "discovery" of Loach was made through *Hidden Agenda*".⁶⁷ Hence Loach offers a privileged site for understanding the critical reception of British cinema during the 1990s and this next section will try to unravel why this British director provoked such critical appraisal and what kind of debates his films provoked.

Idealisation: Ken Loach, the Social and the Political

The low profile of Ken Loach in the 1980s was largely a result of his decision to return to making television documentaries; works that were all heavily censored such as *Questions of Leadership* (1983) and *Which Side Are You On?*

⁶⁷ Philippe Pilard, "A view from Paris", *Vertigo*, Spring 1994, 41.

(1984).⁶⁸ At the beginning of the 1990s, however, the British director was able to raise finance for film projects, usually from Channel Four and foreign co-production sources and since 1990 he has directed almost a film a year including *Riff Raff* (1991), *Raining Stones* (1993, Jury Prize at Cannes), *Ladybird Ladybird* (1994), *Land and Freedom* (1995, César Award for Best Foreign Film) and *My Name is Joe* (1998). *The Navigators* (2001), which only received a television airing on Channel Four in Britain, was widely released in French cinemas and the film was critically acclaimed without exception for the debates it sparked off about public services.⁶⁹ In 2001, *Kes* (1969) was shown at Cannes as an homage to Loach's career. Although interestingly *Carla's Song* (1996) and *Bread and Roses* (2000) met with mitigated reception because of their perceived lack of regional and national "authenticity" (*Carla's Song* was set in Nicaragua; *Bread and Roses* in Los Angeles)⁷⁰, his recent *Sweet Sixteen* (2002) and *Ae Fond Kiss* (2003) have both been nominated for the Cannes Golden Palm and widely eulogised in the press.

Like Stephen Frears and Mike Leigh, Ken Loach began his directing career in television and as John Hill has noted, his work "provides something of a bridge between the 'new wave' working-class films of the early 1960s and the films of the 1990s".⁷¹ However, although Ken Loach's cinema has been read as the

⁶⁸ See Julian Petley, "Ken Loach and Questions of Censorship", in Georges McKnight, *Agent of Challenge and Defiance: The Films of Ken Loach* (Towbridge, Wilts.: Flicks Books, 1997), 99-124.

⁶⁹ See in particular, Franck Garbarz, "The Navigators, La fin d'un monde", *Positif*, 491, January 2002, 6-7 and Thomas Sotinel, "The Navigators; la vie privatisée des cheminots anglais", *Le Monde*, 11 January 2002.

⁷⁰ See P. A., "Ken Loach à l'eau de 'roses'", *Libération*, 25 October 2000.

⁷¹ John Hill, "Failure and Utopianism: Representations of the Working-Class in British Cinema of the 1990s", in Robert Murphy (ed.), *British Cinema in the 90s* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 179.

expression of a "typically British" visual national idiom, it is also possible to approach his realist aesthetics within the wider context of recent directions in European film. As John Orr has noted: "In Western Europe, certainly the major tendencies of our day are diverse *re-formations* of realism in which different modernist tropes are stylistically integrated". What Orr describes as a neo-Bazinian aesthetic, "usually stresses ensemble acting (with improvisation and comic diversion) and obviates star quality"⁷². In this context, what is also particularly characteristic of the neo-Bazinian films of such diverse directors as Eric Rohmer and Ken Loach, is that, "to make a social or psychological judgement is to make a moral one". According to Orr, the antecedent of those films go back "to the Bazinian source of the European collective, Jean Renoir".⁷³ In addition, Jacob Leigh has maintained that

Loach's work improves in the 1990s because he starts to work more in the mainstream traditions of narrative cinema, in the tradition of European realist film-makers; one can appreciate the influence on this work of the Italian neo-realists, and the Czech and French 'new waves'.⁷⁴

As we will see, the Bazinian and Renoirian connections Orr points to in his discussion of European realism are highly relevant in the case of French critical discussions of the films of Ken Loach. In 1991 *Riff Raff* marked the return of the British director to theatrical distribution and its release gave rise to a distinct resurgence of critical interest. The first of three films concerned with working-class characters in Thatcher and post-Thatcher Britain, the other two being *Raining Stones* (1993) and *Ladybird Ladybird* (1994), the trilogy

⁷² John Orr, "New Directions in European Cinema", in Elisabeth Ezra (ed.), *European Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 301-2, emphasis in text.

⁷³ *ibid*, 304.

⁷⁴ Jacob Leigh, *The Cinema of Ken Loach: art in the service of the people* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 177.

occupies an important place in the study of the critical reception of British cinema. The Loach trilogy was productively posited on the cusp of definitions of the nature of (French) cinema and I want to approach the films as a point of departure from which to broach a series of questions; in particular French anxieties about the *auteur*, the discursive struggle about the place of the social and realism in French cinema and the film's close relation to a set of topical extra-textual discourses around "the social breach" (*la fracture sociale*).

A documentary-style comedy set on a London building site, *Riff Raff* was welcomed by many critics both as a document on British national culture and for its unique style of direction. Interestingly, the review in *Cahiers du cinéma* made the Renoirian connection explicit:

The precision of Ken Loach's *Riff Raff* makes one think of Renoir's *Toni* (with added abrasion) [...] because he has filmed a pure transposition of reality without radicalising the message, except by seizing the black *humour fou* that binds precariously together brothers in despair, because above all his characters *have this fatal beauty that marks the great tragedies*.⁷⁵

The success of these features was strongly attributed to Loach's direction. According to another critic, however, what seemed particularly distinctive about the style of Ken Loach was that his direction was characterised by a composite blending of fictional drama with documentary techniques:

Loach systematically refuses to employ long takes, in other words he refuses to allow for the temporal homogeneity of the recording camera and of the recorded action. For him, it is not a case of pretending to capture the real, but to make reality as legible as possible; a reality already approached from the initial stages (the investigation) and then reconstituted by the fiction.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Camille Taboulay, "*Riff Raff*", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 445, June 1991. 46, emphasis in text.

⁷⁶ Olivier Kohn, "Ladybird. Y'a-t-il une 'Loach touch'?", *Positif*, 404, October 1994, 7.

The identification of Loach as an accomplished *auteur* was also based on a retrospective account of the body of his work. His directorial style was labelled by French critics "the Loach touch" in a tribute to another *auteur* (the "Lubitsch touch") and, as his trademark, this "Loach touch" was gradually used to evaluate or reassess his past work⁷⁷. As Philippe Pilard put it: "The 'Loach Touch' is a particular mix of questioning the real, indignation, vigorous modesty, optimistic courage and humour. In short it is a question of morality".⁷⁸

Loach has been credited for inventing a style inspired by, but marking a decisive rupture, with neo-realism since *Cathy Come Home* (1966).⁷⁹ His portrayal of women has been discussed in terms of "frontality", the recurrent images of women weeping in his films, "indecent, yet invigorating".⁸⁰ Moreover, while Loach became part of the auteurist canon, his films were also discussed in terms of their authentic representation of contemporary Britain; for instance *Positif* noted that with *Riff Raff*, Loach "dives into the racial melting pot of the new poor".⁸¹

Beyond its own value, the trilogy became emblematic of a whole "genre" or sub-genre of film. Vincent Pinel's section on "the social film", in his book *Ecoles, genres et mouvements au cinéma*, includes a large still image from

⁷⁷ When *Poor Cow* was showed on the television channel Arté, *Télérama* headlined, "La marque Loach".

⁷⁸ Philippe Pilard, "A propos de Kenneth Loach", in Bernard Nave and Philippe Pilard (eds.), *Ken Loach: Retrospective* (Nice: Cinémathèque de Nice, 1996), 2, see also, "La Loach Touch" in Philippe Pilard, *Land and Freedom, étude critique* (Paris: Nathan, 1997), 53.

⁷⁹ Laurent Roth, "Le zoom ou l'entrave des corps", *Images Documentaires*, 26/27, 1997, 46.

⁸⁰ Annick Peigné-Giuly, "La femme, figure de compassion chez Loach", *Images Documentaires*, 26/27, 1997, 93.

⁸¹ Philippe Niel, "Riff Raff", *Positif*, 365-366, July-August 1991.

Raining Stones as emblematic of the genre which he defines as "that which analyses the relations between classes within a society, expresses the point of view of the more humble in society and pleads in their favour".⁸² Thus we can see that the cinema of Ken Loach provided a specific instance of "good" cinema with his small-scale personal films in the humanist tradition conforming to the ideals of the film *d'auteur*, and providing an account of social problems.

However, if Loach's films made such an impact with French critics, it is also because they found that in contrast French *auteur* cinema was elitist, narcissic and removed from social reality:

His style is a lot less cautious than any attempts made in France in relation to the same subject matter; with its quasi documentary outlook, *Raining Stones* is a remarkable success.⁸³

Loach's films were used as a benchmark against which to view the distance French cinema had taken from social and political issues:

We find in *Raining Stones* the best of Loach: minimal decoupage, a real grace in the direction of actors, always striving towards accuracy without falling into sordid realism [...] *Raining Stones* is certainly not an exercise in collective good conscience. It should not even be an exemplary film. But if it gives the impression to be so, perhaps we should ask ourselves why, on this side of the Channel, this kind of cinema barely exists since Pialat.⁸⁴

It is worth pausing for a moment on the major trends in French cinema that could give rise to such a judgement. In the 1980s and 1990s, three major generic trends emerged in French cinema. First, young *auteur* cinema, a return

⁸² Vincent Pinel, *Ecoles, genres et mouvements au cinéma* (Paris: Larousse, 2000), 206.

⁸³ *Positif*, Octobre 1993, 15

⁸⁴ Nicolas Saada, "Travail au noir", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 472, October 1993, 62-3.

to the New Wave with its detached attitude to social and political issues; second popular domestic genres such as comedies and third internationally successful large-scale productions such as the *Cinéma du Look* and costumes films. All three fell short of British-style realism. Both the glossy *Cinéma du Look* of Luc Besson, Jean-Jacques Beineix and Leo Carax and French heritage were critically disparaged during the 80s and early 90s. *Le Grand Bleu* (Besson, 1988) was seen as symptomatic of a deep crisis in the French film industry, a crisis in style and a crisis in scriptwriting epitomized by the appeal that advertising had for younger directors. By contrast with its support by the popular film press, for cinephile critics, the *cinéma du look* was critically disparaged as an escapist cinema, being all style and no narrative substance, marking the weakening of the New Wave inspired *auteur* cinema as a space of resistance against the "commercial system".

The last film to express the real with force and conviction is Doillon's *Le petit criminel*. It is obvious that this exception confirms a rule: French cinema is crucially missing food for thought.⁸⁵

Generally, though, French *cinéma d'auteur* was itself becoming increasingly criticised for avoiding "reality" and attempting to escape from contemporary issues. In *Le Monde*, Olivier Mongin compared the *auteur* cinema of André Téchiné's *J'embrasse pas* (1991) and Olivier Assayas' *Paris s'éveille* (1991) negatively with Ken Loach's *Riff Raff* and asked,

Why does that country show, and in a much better way than France, that the realm of the social has not suddenly disappeared?⁸⁶

Thus paradoxically, the films of Ken Loach found a positive reaction with a

⁸⁵ Serge Toubiana: "Trajectoire en vingt points", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 443/444, May 1991, 46.

⁸⁶ Olivier Mongin, "Cinéma et société. L'exclusion dans les têtes", *Le Monde*, 24 January 1992, 2.

critical audience usually concerned with cinematic form and the figure of the *auteur* and, in the case of *Cahiers du cinéma*, traditionally opposed to the idea of British cinema but also to "sociological" films. Yet, it is the ideological and sociological aspect of his films, which was clearly the object of attention. Although certain sections of film criticism concentrated primarily on the formal attributes of Ken Loach's cinema, they also invariably took into account the political themes and social issues the British director was reflecting in his films:

Before the release of Frears' *The Snapper* (another way of covering the same subject matter), *Raining Stones* reminds us of this paradox: while English cinema has ceased to exist as an entity, several directors have kept an extremely acute outlook on the reality that surrounds them and that has no equivalent in French cinema since Pialat chose to concentrate on other themes.⁸⁷

British cinema and its realist aesthetic presented a "therapy" for the perceived absence of representations of the social in French cinema. As can be seen from the preceding quotations, positive readings of British cinema were explicitly combined with a charge directed at French cinema. The manner in which it avoided reality was said to "show up a French weakness".⁸⁸ In this respect, the reception of British films has to be seen in the context of a particular French historical conjuncture, namely the tail end of the Mitterrand years. Philippe Pilard explained the French reaction in these terms:

It is true that if there is something lacking in contemporary French cinema, it is its lack of interest in social investigation. Not that this world is totally absent from our films, but that it only exists as a backdrop, more or less neatly drawn. One only has to see the convoluted affairs of the heart which constitute the principal subjects of our films, such as the

⁸⁷ Thomas Sotinel, "C'est ainsi que les hommes vivent", *Le Monde*, 9 October 1993, 13.

⁸⁸ Olivier Mongin, above cited, 2.

success of Cyril Collard's *Les Nuits fauves* [*Savage Nights*] to ask whether our cineastes and our producers are at all aware that the rate of unemployment in France is over 12% [...] With Ken Loach's films a certain French 'left' is able to find itself again, as it did when it recently demonstrated in the streets to defend state education.⁸⁹

Ken Loach's films were circulating in a context where the "social breach" had attained a high media profile and thus his films tapped into an atmosphere of social malaise. "*La fracture sociale*" received particular attention in reviews of British films and reached something of a climax with the Loach trilogy. The discussion of "the social breach" related to the increasing disparity between haves and have-nots in French society and was somewhat different from the concept of the "underclass" in Britain. The "social breach" has been discussed, for example in terms of exclusion ("*les laissés pour compte*"), deskilling, precariousness, and disenfranchised youth and its locus was often found in the *banlieues* (working-class council estates on the edge of large cities such as Paris, Lyon or Marseilles) seen as the symptomatic site of urban malaise.

In this respect, British films undoubtedly had some topical relevance (the "social breach" dividing France, for instance was a running motif of Jacques Chirac's electoral campaign of 1995). Conversely, the extraordinary impact of Mathieu Kassowitz' *La Haine*, winner of the Best Director's Prize at Cannes in 1995 for instance, can be read as a symptom of this desire for representations of the "state of the nation". Such comparisons demonstrate that the "social realism" against which French cinema's future was imagined, can be read as a cultural transfer where British cinema was critically read and posited as a "desired" other. The reputation of Loach's films for engaging substantially with

⁸⁹ Pilard, above cited, 41.

social themes and for building narrative structures around groups of characters rather than individual protagonists was starkly contrasted with the French *auteur* cinema, accused of being self-absorbed. In his historical survey Jean-Pierre Jeancolas described French cinema of the period as "conformist" and "even inward-looking".⁹⁰ In a later formulation it was even suggested that the credibility of the image French cinema was projecting abroad was in crisis,

As if quality had degenerated into academicism, as if French *auteur* cinema which stemmed from the new wave, was being increasingly threatened by 'navel-gazing'.

According to this critic, only with the films of Maurice Pialat was French cinema upholding "the legacy of Renoir".⁹¹ The discursive focus on realism and the representation of the "social" was also quite clearly linked to aesthetic concerns about French cinema that emerged most prominently in the late 1980s and 1990s. Thus, throughout the 1990s, British cinema tapped into a desire for realism and for the social commitment perceived as lacking in French cinema. However, a change was around the corner. The most striking trend in French cinema from the mid-1990s onwards, was the "return of the social" with the re-emergence of an overtly committed cinema. This in turn had extremely negative repercussions on French readings of British cinema and it is to the reversal of opinion that we turn now.

Backlash Versus Public Recognition

The film historian René Prédal has traced the creation of the *Jeune cinéma*

⁹⁰ Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, *Histoire du cinéma français* (Paris: Nathan, 1995), 110.

⁹¹ Antoine de Baecque, "Le cinéma français dans le monde", *Politiques*, 3, Summer 1992, 95, 99, emphasis in text.

français to the emergence of a younger generation of directors formed at the French film school FEMIS (formerly IDHEC) or in university film courses who in their low-budget productions use little known or sometimes non-professional actors. Thus along with the trend towards blockbusters and international co-productions, French cinema in the 1990s also saw the emergence of a young *auteur* cinema, or "Young French Cinema", facilitated by national supporting bodies such as the *Centre National de la Cinématographie* and the loan system of the *avance sur recettes* and other state policies such as funding and commissions from television channels and aid offered by local and regional bodies.⁹² The films of these often first-time directors have been predominantly critically constructed in terms of a "return of the social". Thus by 1997, as far as film critics were concerned politics were returning to the screen: "Politics are back in French cinema" announced *Cahiers du Cinéma* whilst *Libération* declared that politics had been "the major concern French cinema" in 1997.⁹³ As evidence, the newspaper *Libération* mentioned young filmmakers' petitions in support of illegal immigrants (the *sans-papiers* affair) and the commercial success of *Marius et Jeannette* (Robert Guédigian, 1997) and *Western* (Manuel Poirier, 1997). The defining characteristics of the new realism were often likened by critics to British filmmakers such as Stephen Frears, Mike Leigh and Ken Loach. The feeling of inferiority in relation to the British social art cinema that had developed was in the process of being reversed in the latter part of the 1990s.

⁹² René Prédal, *Le Jeune cinéma français* (Paris: Nathan Cinéma, 2002).

⁹³ Antoine de Baecque, "Marseilles, mémoires politiques", *Cahiers du cinéma*, 521, February 1997, 55, Gérard Lefort, "Autrement politique", *Libération*, 31 December 1997.

As *Positif* put it,

This small group of French directors, although still a minority, shows that our cinema too is able to investigate the social arena as well as British directors.⁹⁴

The critical construction of "good" British cinema in terms of its *auteurs* was in contrast with the discussion of popular box-office successes. When films such as *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997), *Brassed Off* (Mike Herman, 1996), *Go Now* (Michael Winterbottom, 1996), *East is East* (Daniel O Donnell, 1999), *Face* (Antonia Bird, 1997), *Ratcatcher* (Ramsay, 2000) were released in France, they attracted a wide audience; they were generally marketed as comedies, for instance the French title for *East is East* was *Fish and Chips* and constructed as a group of films with a certain British unity and coherence, especially in their refraction of the politics of Thatcherism. Loach was largely credited for the emergence of the most commercially successful "working-class" features such as *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) and *Brassed Off* (Mark Herman, 1996). *Brassed Off* was extremely popular at the box-office and the film journal *L'Avant-Scène du cinéma* published the film's shooting script with added articles on the English brass band tradition. The critical reception of *Brassed Off* is highly interesting in that it provides an insight into critical paradigms away from the aura of a lionised *auteur* such as Loach but also, by repercussion, into the critical construction of his films as instances of good British cinema. Thus, whilst for *Positif* *Brassed Off* was "a most sensational film" with its "fusion of British realism with the populist fantasies

⁹⁴ Frank Garbarz, "Le renouveau social du cinéma français", *Positif*, 442, December 1997, 74.

of a Capra"⁹⁵, *Studio Magazine* admired it as "a film *à la* Ken Loach, in its spirit, in the setting, in its look and also in its acting".⁹⁶ However, *Libération* deemed that although its thematic concerns were clearly indebted to Loach, *Brassed Off* was clearly lacking in style:

In a pure social style *à la* Loach, a poignant diatribe against Thatcher and her reactionary henchmen. It's worth a look despite the formal weakness of the whole (very television).⁹⁷

The film reminded *Cahiers du cinéma* of the "poor" state of the British film industry, presumably because it had received some American financing through Miramax:

One is automatically reminded of British cinema; stricken, decimated, endangered and counting on its fingers the number of its survivors [...] the filmmaker oscillates between the scathing naturalism of Ken Loach and Frears's bawdy earthiness.⁹⁸

The most scathing review of all however came from Serge Kaganski of *Les Inrockuptibles*,

Brassed Off is typically British: the script is well executed, the actors rather good, the anti-Thatcher message obvious, the divide between the workers, as dignified victims and the cynical and heartless technocrats, clearly defined [...] As for the mise-en-scène, is it subservient to the story like a printer to a computer (flawless but without an ounce of feeling or personality). This is often the problem with English cinema: a lot of England inside but no cinema.⁹⁹

It is clearly the case that the frontier between cinema and television has never been as clear-cut in Britain as in France. Yet, Loach's films (and those of Frears and Leigh for that matter) despite their close links to television have never been branded negatively as "televisual" because he has been critically

⁹⁵ Eithne O'Neil, *Positif*, July-August 1997, in Bertrand Leverageois (ed.), *L'Avant-scène du cinéma*, 490, March 2000, 118.

⁹⁶ Michel Rebichon, *Studio*, July-August 1997, in *L'Avant-scène du cinéma*, above cited, 116.

⁹⁷ Didier Perron, *Libération*, 25 June 1997, *ibid*, 115.

⁹⁸ Bernard Bénoliel, *Cahiers du cinéma*, July-August 1997, *ibid*, 116.

⁹⁹ Serge Kaganski, *Les Inrockuptibles*, 25 June 1997, *ibid*, 116.

constructed as an *auteur* (despite the fact that, ironically, his films have often received financing from European television).

Thus, although Loach was cited in most reviews as the looming influence on *Brassed Off*, French critics still disparaged the latter film. *Brassed Off* was "compromised" since, as a co-production between Channel Four Films and the American production company Miramax, it had received some American funding. But, importantly, it was also disparaged because its director is no *auteur*. This led the reviewers to lament British cinema as "decimated" and "stricken" and to dismiss the formal attributes of the film as "formal weakness" and "*très téléfilm*" (*Libération*), culminating in "no cinema" (*Les Inrockuptibles*), a comment which clearly signalled a return to the Truffaut and Godard polemics of the New Wave years, as I explored in chapter two.

In a double irony, during the latter part of the 1990s, British social realist filmmaking provided one of the principal "others" against which to construct a French difference. This difference began to surface in film culture shortly after essays in *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif* argued that French cinema had seen the "return of the social". French critics increasingly came to the defence of French cinema and gradually a backlash was mounted against the denigration of French cinema and the elevation of British cinema as a model that should be emulated. In a special issue of *Cahiers du cinéma* marking the anniversary of the May 1968 events, this backlash against British cinema as a model for French cinema reached its culmination. In a scathing article, critic Emmanuel Burdeau launched an attack on British cinema for its clichéd representations of working-class characters and for being safely watchable and artistically conservative. If British realism and sense of social commitment had previously

functioned as a model for French cinema, Burdeau's article is symptomatic of the new backlash against British cinema. It is worth quoting him at length:

First, let's not be deceived by the wrong model. The latest fashion, consolidated by the old anti-Hollywood knee-jerk reaction, is leading some to be keen to erect British cinema as a reference for French cinema. With the slogan *French people, try harder if you want to be as realist and as 'social' as the English*, our cinéastes are incited to take inspiration from Mike Leigh, Ken Loach, *The Full Monty* and others. The reference is easily grasped but it is obviously a delusion, since the inclusion of the figure of the popular in that cinema is made at the price of excessive theatricality, giving birth to films that are only 'social' in that they orchestrate a small social spectacle [...] A spectacle a bit obscene, since the cinematic proletarian has become a selling point by virtue of the repulsion he inspires *a priori*. French cinema has nothing to learn from this cinema for whom realism (political or not) is always about the accumulation of signs (or points): signs of ugliness (physical and/or moral; see the grimacing in Mike Leigh films), signs of poverty, signs of distress ... and where the best is the one that can stock as many of these as possible.¹⁰⁰

Burdeau's mention of ugliness is strikingly reminiscent of Truffaut's prejudices against British cinema, as we saw in chapter two, and is thus another instance of the way in which disparaging British cinema is at the core of *Cahiers du cinéma's* self-identity. As the backlash against British cinema was gathering momentum in certain sections of French film culture, another significant event was taking place that perhaps forced some critics to reconsider their attitude towards British cinema. The *Typiquement British* festival which ran from 4th October 2000 through to 5th March 2001 at the Pompidou Centre in Paris was an important cultural event which major sectors of mainstream media treated as such. This festival was jointly organised by the British Council, the British Film Institute and the Pompidou Centre and

¹⁰⁰ Emmanuel Burdeau, "68/98, retour et détours", *Cahiers du cinéma*, May 1998, 43, emphasis in text.

consisted of over 200 British features organised in 13 themed strands. Although it can be argued that the choice of films was somewhat obvious and reproduced the established canon of British filmmaking, the festival nevertheless gave French audiences an insight into British cinema history (some features were showed with subtitles for the first time). According to the Pompidou press office, the box-office was around 4,000 a week.¹⁰¹ The event was reported extensively in all national magazines and newspapers and a recurring theme of the press coverage was the relative invisibility of British cinema in France previously which was blamed solely on François Truffaut, although, as we have seen in chapter two, others such as Jacques Rivette and Eric Rohmer had vilified British cinema in their writings of the 1950s, whilst Jean-Luc Godard has stuck to his negative judgment right up to in his 1998 *Histoire (s) du cinéma*.

Press reports nevertheless expressed the view that the increased visibility of British cinema in France through the festival might motivate certain critics to forget or question their traditional prejudices about British cinema. The issue was taken up in *Libération*:

The French have for a long time misunderstood the films made by their neighbours across the Channel. No doubt this is the fault of François Truffaut, who once said that British cinema was 'a contradiction in terms'.¹⁰²

According to the filmmaker Bertrand Tavernier, who was quoted in *Libération*, "that phrase had been repeated everywhere. For forty years it has

¹⁰¹ All following quotes are from the Beaubourg press pack; page numbers have been deleted through scanning.

¹⁰² Edouard Waintrop, "Le cinéma anglais, pas si manche", *Libération*, 3 October 2000.

formed the foundation of the French critical perspective"¹⁰³ whereas *Le Monde* reflected that the festival was filling a cultural gap due to the misconceptions that had existed in France,

We can only bemoan the fact that English cinema was left out of critical debates, since there was on the one hand those who had seen the films and on the other those who had forged an opinion without having seen them.¹⁰⁴

Le Nouvel Observateur wondered if, "as everyone in France knows, there is no such thing as British cinema how has it been possible to find over 200 films of such high quality?" According to this critic this was the event of the year, "and so perhaps it is time for Truffaut's often repeated judgement finally to be laid to rest".¹⁰⁵

To accompany the Beaubourg retrospective, *Positif* produced a dossier on British cinema of the 1940s and in his editorial introducing this special issue, editor Michel Ciment vehemently denounced the idea put forward in some newspaper reviews of the Beaubourg retrospective that all sections of French criticism were to be blamed and launched into another attack on its rival *Cahiers du cinéma*,

Again it is to mistake the part for the whole for want of naming a certain tendency of French criticism, original in bygone days, but nowadays fixated in its dogmas, imprisoned by its blinkered attitude and steeped in the respect for those obsolete Tables of the Law that forbid them to revisit the past and revise their judgments.¹⁰⁶

Despite its strong auteurist slant¹⁰⁷, the *Positif* issue on British cinema of the

¹⁰³ Bertrand Tavernier, quoted in *Libération*, above cited, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁴ S. Bd, "Saison anglaise au Centre Pompidou", *Le Monde*, 10 October 2000.

¹⁰⁵ 5 October 2000

¹⁰⁶ Michel Ciment, editorial, *Positif*, 478, December 2000, 1.

¹⁰⁷ Bertrand Tavernier, "Eloge d'Alberto Cavalcanti", 79-82, Jean-Pierre Coursodon, "Michael Powell et les Archers, en guerre et en paix 1940-1950", 83-87, Noël Herpe, "David Lean ou

1940s also included an article by Michael Redgrave, first published in 1955¹⁰⁸, a feature on Alec Guinness¹⁰⁹, a historical overview of the development of British cinema during the 1940s¹¹⁰ as well as book reviews on the most recent British cinema scholarship in the English language. Also featured was a study of Gainsborough studios costume melodramas (a welcome inclusion in light of the traditional genre and gender-blindness of most French film criticism), where Christian Viviani also pointed to British studies on the subject.¹¹¹

It is not surprising that as British cinema was embraced by the mainstream, it also re-emerged as a crucial tool of distinction. Until recently, histories of French film criticism in the 1950s have largely relied on the description of its development provided by Antoine de Baecque in French and Jim Hillier in English which have focused on the aesthetic positions of *Cahiers du cinéma* and the place of polemics around Hollywood cinema and the critical paradigms of the *politique des auteurs*. However, Pierre Bourdieu has written of the necessity "to establish the conditions in which the consumers of cultural goods, and their taste for them, are produced" and his work has shown how judgements of taste are strongly related to the social positions of participants and clearly associated with struggles for distinction.¹¹²

Chris Darke has argued that "*Positif* has been *Cahiers's* long-standing critical rival and a touchstone whenever the journal's need for redefinition was

l'horizon chimérique", 88-90, Yannick Lemarié, "Carol Reed, Histoire (s) de malentendus", 91-93, Eithne O'Neill, "Hamer, Honneur, humour, horreur", 94-6.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Redgrave, "Je ne suis pas une caméra", 51-4.

¹⁰⁹ Yann Tobin, "Alec Guinness, 1914-2000", 100.

¹¹⁰ Michel Ciment, "Les années 40, naissance du cinéma britannique", 76- 8.

¹¹¹ Christian Viviani, "Le velours et le vertige. Les mélodrames en costume de la Gainsborough", 97-9.

¹¹² Bourdieu, 1984, above cited.

pressing".¹¹³ However, British cinema, like Hollywood, has also been enmeshed in the critical debates that have emerged in French film culture throughout its history, providing both *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif*, at different stages in their history, a crucial means of positing themselves against the prevailing standards of the mainstream *and* of expressing their difference against each other. Consequently, in the November 2002 issue of *Positif* editor Michel Ciment renewed his criticism of *Cahiers'* dismissal of British cinema.¹¹⁴

In the 1990s, with the waning of classic cinephilia, British cinema had probably become, with French cinema, one the last objects around which polemics could be sustained and it allowed critics to justify the broad aesthetic and ideological positions that fuel and distinguish their criticism. Godard's ongoing dismissal of British cinema could also been seen partly in this light; predicting the "end of cinema" and mourning the "old" cinephilia in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, his grandiloquent echoing of his own and Truffaut's anti-British prejudice serves as the nostalgic commemoration of a passing tradition.

Conclusion

The French reception of British cinema in the 1990s was revealing for the way in which it articulated certain anxieties and concerns about the French auteur cinema before the advent of the *Jeune cinéma français* and the "return of the social". The successful critical reception of British films was thus itself

¹¹³ Chris Darke, "Cahiers du cinéma in the 1980s", *Screen*, 34:4, Winter 1993, 367.

¹¹⁴ Michel Ciment, "Effets de mode et de dogme", *Positif*, 501, November 2002, 1.

intimately bound up with the emergence of discursive struggles around the nature of French cinema and of its engagement with the social.

The chapter has looked in particular at the way in which an extremely positive conception of British filmmaking became enshrined in the realist ethic of the work of Ken Loach, and how the positive reception of his films was inscribed within the critical discourses of the moment which found that in contrast, the French *auteur* cinema seemed removed from contemporary social and political reality. This chapter has argued that the impact of Ken Loach was thus the result of a specific cultural climate where the ultimate criterion of excellence was the representation of subject matters and themes that were found lacking in the French *auteur* cinema of the period.

This process of cross-cultural transfer and idealisation was produced by a specific crisis of critical anxiety over French cinema which peaked during the mid-1990s but was already beginning to show signs of eroding with the "return of the political" in French cinema later in the decade.

In that context, although the cultural status of British cinema had been established, its significance as a model for French cinema became contested. As we have seen, an ongoing tendency that has characterized dominant French cinephilia and its reading of British cinema still persisted, nostalgically clinging to a past when taste as cultural distinction meant to be *against* as a process of self-definition and difference from other cinephile publications.

Reception and canonisation are nationally specific and in that sense, critical reviews on British films are mirrors and screens, reflections and projections. As well as indicating judgements about British cinema, French reviews of British films reveal the perceived strengths and limitations of French cinema,

for, I would argue, what is and has been historically of paramount importance for French critics is above all their own native cinema and this issue has remained constant throughout the historical period under scrutiny in this research. This chapter has shown that during a short period the positive critical evaluation of "Brit-grit", films in the "social realist" idiom was always accompanied by negative comparisons with French cinema. Accounts of British cinema at this particular historical juncture provide a distorting mirror that articulates certain anxieties about the state of French cinema.

This historical account has registered a shift back to ontological values and social concerns and the ideology of the *auteur* as the guiding assumptions and paradigms with which to read film. However, paradoxically, while Ken Loach was considered to be an emblematic figure of British cinema, he was at the same time perceived as a maverick director. The fact that his films not situated in the U.K. held no interest for French critics also points to the difficult and shifting conception of authorship in relation to national identity. It must also be noted that the French recognition of certain British directors as *auteurs* is in stark contrast with discussions of their work in the context of British film culture. For instance, in a recently published monograph on *My Beautiful Laundrette*, at no time does Christine Geraghty in an otherwise excellent analysis allude to Stephen Frears as an *auteur* or to his career as a director. Instead Geraghty chooses to focus solely on Hanif Kureishi and his input as a scriptwriter which leads her to discuss the film in terms of representation, following cultural theorist Stuart Hall and in the context of black and ethnic

filmmaking in Britain.¹¹⁵

Thus we can see that the reception accorded British directors in France proves not only that canonisation is affected by the national context but it also confirms that within French film culture the concept of authorship has more currency than that of genre or school. Crucially, as Ginette Vincendeau has noted, whilst realism, with indigenous comedies, occupies some space where the national identity of French cinema may be found,

Some would argue that the key to the identity of French cinema, both institutionally and critically, are its *auteurs*, the true exponents of the 'real [French] cinema' advocated by Delluc.¹¹⁶

The figure of the *auteur* and the concept of realism have been major paradigms for locating what is interesting and valuable (or execrable) in cinema and are intimately bound up with questions of national identity. Consequently, even though there are major cultural and structural differences that exist between the French and the British modes of film production, the same criteria have been applied to British cinema and a few *auteurs* added to the canon while mainstream British films and popular British genres, apart from Ealing and horror, have routinely been ignored. Although British cinema has now been recognised publicly in mainstream French film culture, it is not possible to affirm with any certainty that there is a clear perception of the larger concept of British cinema.

¹¹⁵ Christine Geraghty, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

¹¹⁶ Ginette Vincendeau, *The Companion to French Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1996), 10-1.

Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to document what kind of readings of British cinema were produced in post-war France by taking into account the historical conjuncture within which they appeared. In the process, this research has uncovered positive readings and thus redressed the historiography that has characterised the representation of the French perspective as uniformly negative. In addition, this study has also showed how the reception of British cinema has been embedded in competitive power struggles to define the field of cultural production and must be thus understood as an articulation of anxieties and concerns about the identity of French cinema itself.

My argument has centred on an examination of contemporary reviews as a prism through which the identity of French cinema may be articulated or refracted. I have re-located French writing within the socio-historical framework of post-war film culture. By examining the French reception of British cinema alongside the debates of André Bazin, Georges Sadoul, François Truffaut, *Positif*, *Midi-Minuit fantastique* and others, the discourses of realism and auteurism have been shown to be fundamental to the critical reception of British cinema. Indeed, as the various case studies in the previous chapters have demonstrated, readings of British cinema indicate the continued strength and significance of realism and auteurism amongst French critical circles. The reception of British cinema may thus be seen as saying more, or at least as much about constructions of French cinema and culture than they do about British films.

Chapter one laid the foundations of the rest of the thesis by examining critical debates around the issue of realism. After the liberation in the 1940s with the consensus around the cardinal value of realism as well as general assumptions about truth and authenticity in the context of fears about Americanisation with the Blum-Byrnes agreements, British cinema represented a cultural ideal. This positive interpretation must also be interpreted as a by-product of the perceived lack of realism in French cinema, in contrast with Italian neo-realism and the influence of the documentary movement on British cinema immediately after the war. However, in a climate of increasingly polarised political positions, as the Cold War intensified and critical debates around realism mapped onto a debate around form versus content, between aesthetic and political agendas, British cinema which had mostly succeeded in tapping the diverse constituents of an increasingly divided French film culture, came increasingly under attack.

The examination of the 1950s period in chapter two, suggested that to understand Truffaut and the New Wave's response to British cinema it is necessary to come to terms with the polemical aspect of cinephilia and in particular its paradoxical elevation of the figure of Alfred Hitchcock as a great *auteur* representing the epitome of Hollywood cinema. I showed how the impact of the *politique des auteurs* and mise en scène as a criterion of value impacted on the critical reception of British cinema in the context of a cultural and political strategy informed by the need to detach films from their social context, to provoke the French film establishment and overturn its regime of taste in order to make way for a new French cinema. In their assimilation of the "badness" of British cinema with that of mainstream French cinema, the critics

of the New Wave invested British cinema with the concerns they felt about certain manifestations of own native cinema, most notably the polished, big budget literary adaptations of the French tradition of Quality. In this context, a director such as David Lean, who had been highly respected during the previous decade for his adaptations of literary classics, was one of the first British directors to be marginalized by the Young Turks' hostility.

In chapter three, I argued that the discourse around the *fantastique* provided on the one hand an imaginative dimension lacking in French cinema, and on the other, the cult around *Peeping Tom* also offered a reconfiguration of British filmmaking involving the discovery of a new *auteur*. Such reconfiguration may be interpreted as a symptom of the need to counteract the dominant economy of cinephile taste illustrated by *Cahiers du cinéma*, as well as having resonances in the context of a series of repressed issues that faced post-war France, such as the memory of the Occupation and the conflict of the Algerian war. In the context of French society in the 1960s, the cult reception of British horror may be interpreted as having played out the dialectics between Eros and Thanatos and the polarities between good and evil. I see the discovery of *Peeping Tom* as a cultural transfer, that is the appropriation and exploration of something Other and lacking in French cinema, coupled with the foregrounding of the *auteur*, posited as an exception.

In chapter four, I isolated Ken Loach as a particularly pertinent example of the French reception of British cinema because in the responses to his films were condensed all the different levels of enquiry with which the thesis as a whole has been concerned: realism, auteurism and British cinema as a prism in which the major concerns and anxieties about French cinema are refracted. The

canonisation of the socio-political dimension of British cinema in the 1990s, in particular the films of Ken Loach can be seen as the articulation of a kind of yearning for a more clearly defined form of politics and to a perceived lack of such concerns in French cinema. The idealisation and appropriation of Ken Loach may thus be read in terms of a narcissistic investment but also as a defence against feelings of guilt.

Finally, it may be useful to add a brief word in the importance of the controversies and polemics described in this thesis for the reception of British cinema as a whole. The category of taste, as Pierre Bourdieu has observed, is ideologically loaded and embedded in the social. Taste serves as a marker of identity and status and as a marker of the processes of exclusion and inclusion. The practices of inclusion and exclusion in critical discourses are partly power struggles in which critics fight to advance their criteria and champion particular styles and ideas. In addition, these are connected, or overlap with political, religious and moral struggles outside the artistic community.

As products of culture are used for particular interests, the formation of the critical canon can be seen as a form of social power that makes clear the boundary separating different groups. As we have seen, the struggle for dominance to define culture and taste between different factions, however, also concerned the frame of legitimacy for French cinema's future, its core values and its mission. Critics' different perceptions of British cinema were thus based on distinct views of the nature of French cinema and thus the nature of the self.

It thus becomes clear, then, that the definition and role of British cinema in French film culture has fluctuated according to competing definitions of French cinema. The critical debates that occurred over each historical period

thus indicate the structural object position of British cinema as a site of struggle where competing discourses about the native cinema manipulated the text in order to create meaning.

Historically, the key to the identity of French cinema, both institutionally and aesthetically, has been found to depend upon the figure of the *auteur* and his representation of the real (French cinema never really developed non-realist genres and Jean Renoir is widely seen as the greatest French director). The consistency of such a cultural ideal is evident. Such a national model has been continually projected onto British cinema with the result that a rather narrow understanding of its history has been promoted. French accounts of British cinema have essentially concentrated on a small canon of films and directors, despite the contemporary recognition and continuing general interest in British film.

The study of the French reception of British cinema offers ample scope for further work. Particularly fruitful areas and unresolved issues that further researchers might pursue seems to me to lie in researching local and national histories of the exhibition of British films in France, the exploration of the role of festivals in prefiguring the reception of British cinema and the role of French distribution companies, their marketing strategies and their relationship with the press and critics. I believe this would throw new light on the history of the reception of British cinema in France as a whole.

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Appendix:

Interview with Jean-Paul Török, Paris, 2002.

Leïla Wimmer: During our conversation you told me that British cinema had been the cinema that had been the most despised...

Jean-Paul Török: Before talking about why it was despised, one should start telling why it was loved. To give you my example, I myself had a very anglophile mother, lots of English friends and she took me to the cinema very early. She would take to the best cinema in town, the cinema for the local bourgeoisie, the Rex, a rather luxurious cinema that showed English films. The first film I saw was Korda's *Lady Hamilton*. All through the film I was obviously on the side of the English, I have always been. And the next thing was Michael Powell's *The Red Shoes*, it was the golden age of British cinema at the time, the English cinema of the war and of the after-war period was really at its peak with, I think, more than a thousand million of spectators in England, which means that every English person from the age of ten would go to the pictures at least once a week.

It was a very very lively cinema and in France, it was received and loved by, let's say a section of the enlightened bourgeoisie. For instance to go and see an American movie for a twelve year old child was totally forbidden. American films would play in fleapits, which were in working class suburbs, westerns, thrillers, and films by Minnelli. When my sister and I would go and see a picture by Anthony Mann or Jerry Lewis, we would say we were going to the

Rex. And in Paris it was the same thing; English films with Ealing had a great success in France, they were shown at the Marbeuf which was an extremely luxurious cinema. All the ladies for the 16th arrondissement would go and see these films, that is how they were received. But they were also well received by the critics, whom at the time were largely dominated by the Communist party, and, well before the Cold war, there was a certain hostility towards the United States and thus American cinema. English cinema was admired, English cinema was not vulgar at all, it was clever, it was very fashionable, there was a real vogue for English films [...] I always liked this cinema because I have always loved England.... I think that to like English cinema one has to like England, or English literature and English painting.

Leïla Wimmer: What about French cinema?

Jean-Paul Török: We would go and see quality films, these were the heydays of the French tradition of quality; the films of Autant-Lara, Christian Jacques, Henri Decoin, there were so many.... We will talk later about Truffaut, but he demolished English cinema for the same reasons he demolished the French Tradition of Quality, a cinema of very high technical quality, of polished scripts and refined photography [...] Although they were two very different cinemas of course, because of cultural differences, there was a British Tradition of Quality which was the equivalent of the French Tradition of Quality, there were no *auteurs*, this was not a cinema of *auteurs* at all.

L.W: But at the time the impact of Italian neo-realism was also felt...

J-P.T: There was Italian neo-realism, yes, which was adored by critics ... Its

impact was essentially among critics [...] There was a turnaround inaugurated by the *Cahiers* critics from about 1957-1958 [...] A movement that we called the Hitchcocko-Hawksians of which Truffaut was the leader and that essentially took American cinema as its object of predilection. These were the beginnings of the cinephile movement and its frenzied love for American cinema, B movies in particular. This is very important. These people, we've all done it, would pass their time tracking down the *nanard* as we called it then, third-rate westerns by Boetticher, small B thrillers in suburban cinemas or even in Belgium. So this infatuation with American cinema was accompanied by a total contempt and disinterest for British cinema which was exactly the opposite if you think about it [...] there was at the time in France a considerable americanophilia in the younger generation, a sort of cult of America. I have lived this too; when we saw American films, we saw science-fiction films, even though they were supposed to be contemporary films. These people lived in superb interiors, beautifully dressed, sublimely beautiful women with marvellous make-up; they had fridges and astonishing cars. They were like Martians and that is more or less how we experienced it. The luxury of American cinema was only translating the luxury of America more generally and this was one important element of the fascination and love for American cinema. This also explains the fact that the first cinephiles like Pierre Rissient would hang around the MacMahon cinema because it was originally a cinema that would play films in original version with no subtitles for American troops. Look at Melville, Jean-Pierre Melville, the Stetson, the American car, the cigars [...] Nowadays it's the other way around; there is a very strong Americanophobia. Moreover, the cinephiles were totally apolitical or

downright anti-communist, right wing or even extreme right wing like the *Cahiers du cinéma* clique.

L-W: Yes, Macmahonism was rather like taking the idea of mise-en-scène to its extreme...

J-P. T: That was the idea, Astruc used to say that only mise en scene was meaningful. It was a totally absurd idea, the scenario has no importance, everything should be translated formally, that is in the frame, the camera angles and camera movements. This led Astruc to ... Astruc is someone who just didn't care about telling stories or even actors ... He was only interested in camera movements. When we watch his films today, they are the application of his theory of the camera-stylo-calligraphy. It seems absurd but we believed it at the time. This is the story of Joseph Losey. The Macmahoniens who obviously had no interest in English cinema, loved on the other hand Losey's English films but because they didn't know English cinema, they didn't realise that the style Losey had adopted in England, in the photography, the direction of actors and so on was in fact that of the British cinema of the time and that Losey had totally cast himself in the stylistic mould of English cinema of the period. Which means that there are some Basil Dearden films such as *Victim* for instance that could well be signed Losey and noone would be surprised [...] But because they absolutely ignored English cinema, they imagined all this was due to Losey's style, it's rather amusing.

L-W: Bertrand Tavernier once said that Truffaut had wanted to create a vacuum around Hitchcock to impose him as an *auteur*.

J-P T: Never heard ... Yes, not only Hitchcock, because Truffaut also admired

other people. But it is true that their *politique* was truly a *politique*. it was about promoting American cinema through two carefully elected figures, Hitchcock and Hawks....

L-W: It's rather contradictory since Hitchcock was originally British...

J-P T: Now that is interesting since "le cas Hitchcock"; the beginning of the admiration for Hitchcock had started ... there had been preliminaries, you know as well as me that Hitchcock was considered as a Hollywood *metteur en scene* who handled subject such as thrillers, but a great technician and all the critics said what a shame he only deals in Hollywood formulas, it's not really interesting and so on ... Hitchcock's recognition happened at the *Cinémathèque Française*, I think it was at the rue d'Ulm at the time when Langlois did a retrospective more or less complete of Hitchcock's work, including his British films and Truffaut used that to say, that well, Hitchcock was the exception that confirmed the rule, meaning there was one talented director in England, it was Hitchcock and the others had no talent. Since they completely ignored the films of Victor Saville ou those of Walter Forde and Carol Reed, since they only knew Hitchcock, they just said English cinema was worthless and since Hitchcock had left then obviously it was worse then ever [...].

L-W: Let's go back to the 1950s, so for French critics English cinema...

J-P T: I don't remember but I am sure there were some interesting films in the 50s although in England it is the beginning of the disaffection of the audience, it was vertiginous, television had arrived well before France and then there isn't much happening in English cinema, one would have to wait for the renewal

with, in a very curious way, the parallel development of Free cinema and on the other hand the birth of a new school of British horror films with a return to the myth of Frankenstein and Dracula which had been totally squandered and abandoned by the Americans. This would be an event, not straight away, but anyway it was for me and for a few people at the beginning. Then it all snowballed, in particular with Hammer.

L-W: You were the first...

J-P T: Practically ...When I arrived at *Positif*, I was very young and I had just spent a year in England. I arrived in a journal where, one has to say, if there was a post to be taken it was that of English cinema. There was no competition, it was easy and it was the first article I ever wrote. I had seen in England, practically in hiding, the *Peeping Tom* that had been released with the X label and showed in a double bill with Russ Meyer's film *The Incredible Mister Tease*. I saw *Peeping Tom* in Winchester at the local cinema with the label X and I had been asked to show proof of identity because I was very young and I looked very young. So I arrived at *Positif* and told them you know there is a great film being released in Paris at the Midi-Minuit which was a seedy cinema on the grands boulevards, you must see it, it's *Le Voyeur*, *Peeping Tom*. They wondered whose film it was but then they knew Michael Powell a little, we knew him a little in France. They went to see it and it was a success. I wrote my first article on *Peeping Tom*, which has been reproduced in many American journals since I had been the only one in the world to defend the film while the majority of Anglo-Saxon critics dragged it through the mud.

L-W: And French too ... The review in *Cahiers du cinéma* ...

J-P T: They only wrote two lines. French critics totally ignored it since the Midi-Minuit was a pornographic cinema; there were never any women at the Midi-Minuit, ever.

L-W: Were there a lot of people in Winchester?

J-P T: No, it was in the afternoon, there was noone around.

L-W: This film is now considered a masterpiece...

J-P T: Yes, it's interesting to see how opinions are made, how it slowly evolves. You know it's always the same at the beginning there are two or three people, with Terence Fisher it was the same, it came from people who were more or less aligned with surrealism, with Eric Losfeld's bookshop which was a meeting place. It was also the beginning of the passion and the discovery of cartoons, science-fiction novels. There was a journal called *Fiction, Midi-Minuit fantastique*. All this evolved within a small crucible of about thirty people and then slowly ... It's very funny, it always comes from an elite and then it gradually spreads and then it eventually reaches the media, who obviously feign to discover things ten years after but always omit to mention those who first made the discovery [...] I then carried on writing about English cinema which I knew very well; I had seen Free Cinema and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* in England, so I was well in advance of the French.

L-W: When the films of the British New Wave were released...

J-P T: The films came out and were received with a certain critical success, in

any case outside the *Cahiers du cinéma* circle, especially with left wing critics who were totally wrong. They wrote that *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was a Marxist film because it was about a worker. One can talk about a worker without being a Marxist, and then it was compared with the French New Wave to which it bore no relation whatsoever. Truffaut's phrase when he answered a journalist who had asked him why he didn't make films about workers was that he did not make films about workers because he didn't know them.... I mean there was a reaction against the extremely right wing stance of *Cahiers du cinéma* at the time, especially that of Rohmer...

L-W: And at *Positif*?

J-P T: at *Positif* it was a real mixed bunch of people, we were very free, we could do what we wanted. There were Communists, who were rather nice, on the margins of the party, Christians; there was Roger Tailleur who was madly Gaullist, people from Surrealism. It was considered on the left if you like in relation to *Cahiers* who positioned themselves very clearly on the other side. We were in excellent terms with them; it was a game. It was above all a lot of fun at *Positif*. It was like a bunch of friends who run a journal together and if one liked a film, one could talk about it. I have never had a single comma cut out from an article. It's become much more serious, it's more or less an academic journal nowadays.

L-W: Could we go back to Truffaut; we were talking about *The Soft Skin* and you told me that, well, you compared it to David Lean's *Brief Encounter*; that's

very interesting...

J-P T: Yes, it's a bit superficial though because these are two films that are concerned with adultery. But there is in the style, in the concerted dinginess, in the aesthetic itself of the two films, in the camera movements, in the nervousness of the scenario, troubling analogies. The character of Jean Desailly, for instance, the manner he is directed, could well come from an English film. It's above all the theme that is exactly the same, the theme of guilt, of shame, of social transgression. And the admirable scene in *The Soft Skin* when Desailly is presenting the film about Gide and he doesn't dare acknowledging his girlfriend, because he is scared that he will be recognised and seen with a woman who is not his wife, and thus she has to wait outside and is accosted by a shady guy and he does not dare intervene because he is paralysed, this formidable scene has its exact equivalent in the horrible, brilliant scene in David Lean's *Brief Encounter*. When the two lovers find themselves alone in an apartment lent by a friend who comes back and finds them there. It's a dreadful scene and there is a totally shared inspiration. Truffaut must have lived through adultery and thought that David Lean was right; it's really how it happens, he must have seen *Brief Encounter* again before starting to write the script [...]

LW: Do you think that those French critics who are interested in British cinema are either anglophiles or students of English?

J-P T: It seems essential to me.

LW: Really? The love of Hollywood cinema does not seem necessarily to lead to...

J-P T: In the case of British cinema it is necessary. I love American cinema, but I have no wish to go there. It is the same with Italian cinema. No, in the case of Britain, there is a link with the English soul...

LW: How do you mean?

J-P T: Through British cinema, in particular that of the 1950s and 1930s, there is all the love, the respect, the fascination that one can feel for a people, a culture, a civilisation. If you like English cinema, you like England.

LW: It is interesting, because it does not seem to be the case with other national cinemas.

J-P T: No.

LW: Is that because British films give you an insight into...

J-P T: There is a soul, an aura that does not exist anywhere else. I am not sure why but I am in tears when I see the films of Humphrey Jennings; I am very moved. There is no explanation, I love Constable, the Raphaelites; I love English painting [....]

Alain Resnais has always admired British cinema and proved it with *Providence*. *Smoking No Smoking* is completely Franco-British, a film whose soul, again this overused word, whose soul is English.